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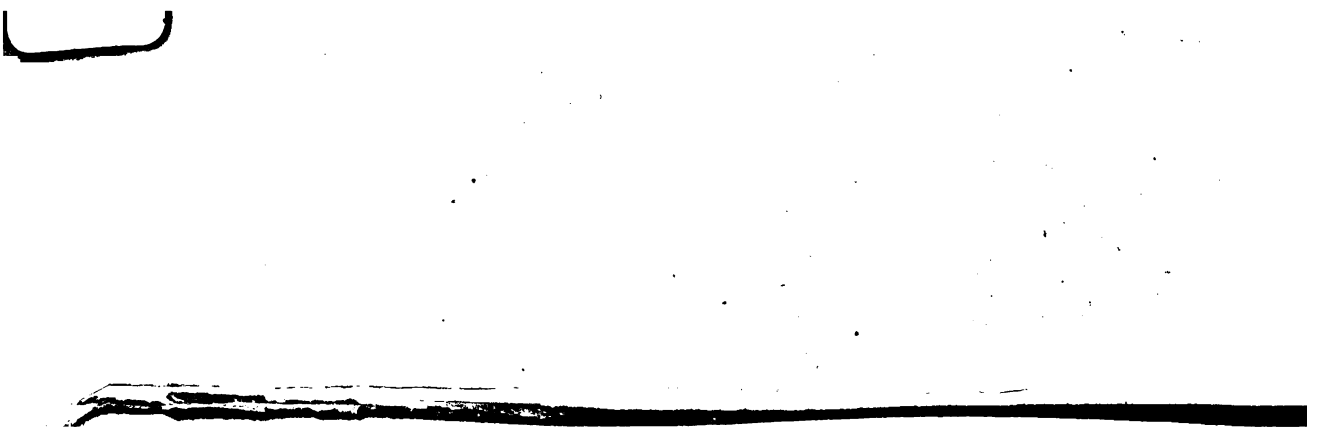

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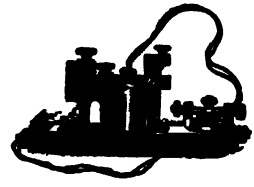
Quite motionless, waiting over the sounder, bent the woman

Supertales of

MODERN MYSTERY

By Arthur Stringer



THE WIRE TAPPERS

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THE WIRE TAPPERS

CHAPTER I

THE discharged prisoner hung back, blinking out at the strong sunlight with preoccupied and unhappy eyes. When the way at last seemed clear he thrust his hands deep in his pockets, and with an assumption of bravado that seemed incongruous to the stern and thoughtful face, sauntered toward Sixth Avenue.

At the corner, a crowd of idlers watched two workmen on a scaffolding, cleaning the stone of Jefferson Market with a sand-blast. It was not until he had forced his way in on one side of this crowd, and edged circuitously out on the other, that he felt at ease with the world. It was like dipping into a stream: it seemed to wash away something scarlet and flaming. A more resolute touch of self-respect came back to him. The square shoulders took on some old-time line of natural dignity. He was of the world again.

He crossed Sixth Avenue with quicker steps, and then, smitten with the pangs of sudden hunger, pushed his way into an oyster-bar on the next street corner.

With his reawakening to actualities came the question as to what the next turn of the grim wheels of destiny would bring to him. For, at heart, he was still sick and shaken and weak. It was his first offense; and he felt the need of some obliterating stimulation. So, even though the heavy odors of that transformed bar-room were as nauseating as the mouldy gaol-smell he had left behind him, he calmly called for coffee and a dozen raw. He ate the oysters as they were opened, between gulps of the hot but rancid coffee. He next directed his attention to a bowl of crackers, moistening them with catchup as he adroitly made away with them.

It was not until then that he noticed the stranger beside him, looking at him pointedly. This stranger was corpulent, and friendly enough of face, but for the blocked squareness of the flaccid jaw and the indefinite pale green glint of the deep-set, predatory eyes that shifted from side to side under the fringe of grayish eyebrow, as though the great neck were too vast a thing to be lightly troubled. He was floridly dressed, the younger man noticed, with a heavy, chased-gold band on one fat finger, and a claw-mounted diamond in the stud on his shirt-front. There was, too, something beefily animal-like in the confident, massive neck that refused readily to move, and in the square upthrust of the great shoulder.

The discharged prisoner returned the other's half-quizzical gaze of inspection. He did so with a look

that was unmistakably belligerent. For, although they stood side by side, they were of two worlds, and the prisoner was no longer a prisoner.

The stranger, unabashed, merely smiled, and leaned amiably against the stool-lined counter.

"What'll you have, Durkin?" he asked, easily.

The other man still glared at him, in silence. Thereupon the stranger with the diamond stud thrust his hands deep down in his pockets, and rocking on his heels, laughed confidently.

"Climb down, my boy, climb down!"

Durkin buttoned up his coat: the gesture was as significant as the slamming of a door.

"Oh, smoke up, and have something with me!"

"Who *are* you, anyway?" demanded Durkin, wheeling on him, jealous of his momentary isolation.

"Me?—Oh, I was just keepin' an eye on you, over yonder!" The stout man jerked a thumb vaguely toward Jefferson Market, then turned to the attendant.

"Slip us a nip o' that London Dry o' yours, Terry, with a plate o' hot beans and sandwiches. Yes, I was kind o' lookin' on, over there. You're up against it, aren't you?"

"What do you mean by that?" asked the other, hungrily watching a leg of boiled ham, from which the attendant was shaving dolefully thin slices.

"Here, brace up on a swig o' Terry's watered bootleg; then we can talk easier. Hold on, though—it won't cost us any more to get comfortable, I guess!"

He ordered the luncheon over to a little round table in a corner of the room. Durkin could already feel the illicit London Dry singing through his veins; he was asking himself, wolfishly, if he could not snatch that proffered meal before taking to flight.

"Now, this isn't monkey-work with me, it's business," announced the newcomer.

"Indeed?" said Durkin, hesitating, and then taking up a fork.

"Now, first thing, I want to tell you something. That song and dance you threw up to the Old Boy over on the bench, about your bein' an electric inventor in hard luck, caught my eye, first thing. Look here, —straight off the bat, d' you want to get a cinch on a good job?"

"I do!" declared Durkin, through a mouthful of beans. "But doing what?"

"Same old thing!" answered the other, offhandedly.

Durkin put down his fork, indignantly.

"What same old thing?" he demanded.

"Operatin', of course!"

Durkin, in a sudden tremor of alarm, felt that the break would come before even that steaming plate of beans was eaten. So he fought back his affronted dignity, and giving no sign of either surprise or wonder, parried for time.

"I'm tired of operating," he said, washing a mouthful of his lunch down with a second glass of Terry's London Dry. "My arm has been giving out."

"Well, I want a man, and I want him quick. You're —er—not very well fixed just now, are you?"

"I haven't a penny!" cried the other, passionately, surrendering to some clutching tide of alcoholic recklessness.

"Well, *my* hours wouldn't kill you!" began the older man, fraternally.

"I'm sick of the sight of a key and sounder!"

"You'd rather do the Edison act in a Third Avenue garret, I s'pose—broodin' round inventin' electrical gimcrackery nobody wants and nobody's goin' to buy!"

"But I tell you somebody *will* want what I'm going to do—and somebody is going to pay money for it, and a heap of money, too!"

"What've you got?" inquired the older man, with the slightest curl of the lip. The younger man seemed nettled by the touch of content in the other's voice.

"I've got an amplifier and I've got a transmitting camera—you needn't laugh, for when I get a relay so sensitive that I can sit in a St. Louis office and send a message to London or Paris, or when I can send a drawing of a train wreck somewhere outside of San Francisco right through to New York, or telegraph a photo or a map or a sketch—why, I've got something that men are going to pay for, and pay well!"

"I've heard of 'em all before—in the dope page o' the Sunday papers!"

"But I tell you I've got this transmitting camera!

"All I want is time and money to work it out, on the business side. Wait a minute, now, and let me explain. If you've operated a key you'll understand it easily enough. You know what we call the Tesla currents, and you know what selenium is. Well, when I first tackled this thing, my problem was to get some special apparatus for reproducing the shadows and high-lights on, say, a photograph. I had to have a different flow of current for light and dark, to carry the impression from the transmitter to the receiver. Well, I found that selenium did the trick, for a peculiarity of that mighty peculiar metal is that it offers less resistance to a current when in the light than in the dark. My next problem was to control the light in the receiving camera. That's where the Tesla currents came in, inducing the rays of vacuum pipes under the high tension. Do you follow me?"

"Yes, go on!" said the other man, impatiently. But his tone was lost on the young inventor, who, under the stress of his excitement, was leaning forward across the little table, gesticulating now and then with long and slender and strangely expressive fingers.

"Now, if I was telegraphing a photograph of you to Chicago, it would have to be in the form of a film, wrapped about a glass cylinder in the transmitter. Light would be thrown on it by means of a convex lens. Now, I cover the glass pipe with vulcanized rubber, or, say, with sealing wax, so that no rays get out, except through the one little window where they'll

fall on the film or the paper moving in front of it. Inside my cylinder is a lens containing selenium, where the rays fall after passing through the glass. But, pshaw, what's all this to you?"

"Go ahead—I'm listenin' I"

"Well, as I was going to tell you, just so much light, or illumination, I ought to say, is given to the selenium cell as you'd see in the light and dark spots of the photograph. That, in turn, means a greater or less resistance offered to the electric current. Its energy is controlled automatically, of course, passing over the wire from the transmitter to the receiver, so that while the transmitting film is passing in front of the selenium at my end of the wire, the sealed tube of Tesla rays at the Chicago office is being moved before a receptive film at the far end of the wire. So the transmitted light escapes through the one little window, and records its impression on the film—and there you are!"

The other man put down his glass, unperturbed.

"Yes, here we are—but if there's so many millions in this apparatus for you, what's the use o' hollerin' it out to all Sixth Avenue? It's fine! It sounds big! It's as good as perpetual motion! But coming down to earth again, how're you goin' to get your funds to put all this pipe-dream through?"

"I'll get them yet, some way, by hook or crook!" protested the younger man, in the enthusiasm of his fourth glass of bootlegger's gin.

"Well, my friend, I'll tell you one thing, straight

out. Stick to me and you'll wear diamonds! And until you're gettin' the diamonds, what's more, you'll be gettin' your three square a day!"

It was the lip of the indignant Durkin that curled a little, as he looked at the glittering stud on the expansive shirt-front and the fat, bejewelled hand toying with the gin glass. Then he remembered, and became more humble.

"I've got to live!" he confessed, mirthlessly.

"Of course you have! And you're a fool to go broke in the teeth of a cinch like this. First thing, though, how'd you ever come to get pinched by Doogan? Here, take another drink—hot stuff, eh! Now, how'd you ever come to get you'self pulled that fool way?"

"I had been living like a street cat, for a week. An Eighth Avenue manufacturing electrician I went to for work, took me up and showed me a wire on his back roof. He advanced me five dollars to short-circuit it for him. Doogan's men caught me at it, and Doogan tried to make me out an ordinary overhead guerrilla."

"Lightnin'-slinger, eh?"

"Yes, a lightning-slinger."

"But I s'pose you notice that he didn't appear against you?"

"Yes, I saw that! And *that's* a part of the business I can't understand," he answered, puzzled by the stranger's quiet smile.

"Say, Durkin, you didn't think it was your good looks and your Fifth Avenue talkin' got you off, did you?"

The younger man turned on him with half-angry eyes. But the stranger only continued to chuckle contentedly down in his throat.

"You remind me of a hen who's just laid an egg!" cried Durkin, in a sudden flash of anger. The other brushed the insult carelessly aside, with one deprecatory sweep of his fat hand.

"Why, *I* had Doogan fixed for you, you lobster!" he went on, as easily and as familiarly as before. "You're the sort o' man I wanted—I saw that, first crack out o' the box. And a friend o' mine named Cottrell happens to stand pat with Muschenheim. And Muschenheim is Doogan's right-hand man, so he put a bee in the Boss's ear, and everything was—well, kind o' dropped!"

The younger man gazed at him in dreamy wonder, trying to grope through the veil of unreality that seemed falling and draping about him. He was marvelling, inwardly, how jolting and unlooked for came the sudden ups and downs of life, when once the traveller is caught up out of the ordinary grooves of existence,—how sudden and moving the drama, when once the feral process is under way.

Then he listened, with alert and quickly changing eyes, as the stranger—to make sure of his man, the discharged prisoner surmised—tapped with his knife on the edge of his chinaware plate.

Durkin read the Morse easily—"Don't talk so loud!" it warned him. And he nodded and wagged his now swimming head, almost childishly, over the little message. Yet all the time he felt, vaguely, that he was under the keen eyes of the stranger across the table from him.

"Where'd you work, before you went to the Postal Union?"

"Up in the woods," laughed the other carelessly, yet still clear-headed enough to feel inwardly ashamed of his laughter.

"What woods?"

"Up in Ontario. I was despatcher, and station-agent, and ticket-seller, and snow-shoveller, and lamp-cleaner, and everything else, for the Grand Trunk at Komoka, where the Tunnel trains cut off from the main line west for Chicago,—and where they still keep their heel on the Union, and work their men like dogs. They paid me forty-two dollars a month—which was small enough!—but out of that salary they deducted any bad money taken in through the ticket-window, when my returns were made up. I was two weeks behind in my board bill when a Port Huron drummer bought a ticket through to Hamilton with a twenty-dollar counterfeit. It came back to me, with my next month's twenty-two dollars, with 'Counterfeit' stencilled out in big letters across the face of it. The loss of that money kind of got on my nerves. I fumed and worried over it until I spoilt my 'send,'

and couldn't sleep, and in some way or other threw an Oddfellows' excursion train into a string of gravel empties! My God, what I went through that night! I knew it, I foresaw it, twenty minutes before they touched. I pounded the brass between the Junction and Sarnia until they thought I was crazy, but we had no way of getting at them, any more than we could get at two comets rushing together. I wired in my resign. I didn't even wait to get my clothes. I struck out and walked across country to St. Thomas, and boarded a Michigan Central for the Bridge!"

The older man watched the nervous hands go up to the moist forehead and wipe away the sweat, but the gesture left him unmoved.

"Then how'd you come to leave the Postal Union?" he asked.

A look of momentary resentment leaped into Durkin's eyes.

"They blacklisted me!" he confessed. "And just for playing their own game!"

The other held up a warning finger.

"Not so loud," he interrupted. "But go on!"

"Of course, when I first came down to New York I went into the P. U. 'carrying a fly.' So I was treated fairly enough, in a way. But I had telegrapher's paralysis coming on, and I knew I was losing time on my amplifier, and I *had* to have money for my new transmitter experiments. I tried to make it up doing over-time, and used to shoot weird codes along Conti-

nental Press Association's leased wires until I got so neurasthenic that the hay-tossers up state would break and ask me to fill in, and then I used to lose my temper and wonder why I didn't stab myself with a flimsy-hook. I knew I had to give it up, but I *did* want enough money to carry along my work with!"

He hesitated for a moment, still gazing down at his plate, until his companion looked at his watch with a brusque "Go on!"

"So I tried another way. When some of the Aqueduct races were going through, on a repeater next to my key, up to Reedy's pool-rooms, I just reached over and held up one side of the repeater. Then, say third horse won, I strolled to the window and took out my handkerchief three times. My confederate 'phoned to our man, and when he'd had time to get his money up I let the result go through. But they discovered the trick, and called me up on the carpet. And all the rest, you know!"

He shook his head lugubriously; then he laughed aloud with a shrug of the insouciant shoulder; then he added, regretfully, "I'd have made a clear five hundred, if they'd only given me another day's chance!"

"Well, I guess maybe you can even up, with us!" And the stranger shook his own head, knowingly, and returned the gaze of the younger man, who was peering at him narrowly, unsteady of eye, but still alertly suspicious. Even in that shadowy substratum to which he had been temporarily driven, good grafts, he knew,

had to be sought for long and arduously. And he had no love for that ever-furtive underworld and its follies. It was a life that rested on cynicism, and no man could be a cynic and live. That he knew. He nursed no illusions as to the eventual triumph of evil, in the ever-shifting order of things earthly; and he remembered, with a sting of apprehension, the joy with which he had plunged into the thick of that street-corner group of untainted fellow-men.

"I think I'd rather get at something decent again," he grumbled, pushing away his bean-plate, but still waiting, with a teasing sense of anxiety, for the other to explain more fully.

"I guess we'd all like to shy around the dirty work, —but a dead sure thing's good enough now and then."

"But where's all the money, in this cinch?" demanded Durkin, a little impatiently.

"I can't cackle about that here, but I tell you right now, I'm no piker! Get into a taxi with me, and then I'll lay everything out to you as we drive up to the house. But here, have a smoke," he added as he got up and hurried to the door that opened on the side street. Durkin had never dreamed that tobacco —even pure Havana tobacco—could be so suave and mellow and fragrant as that cigar.

"Now, you asked me about the money in this deal," the older man began, when he had slammed the taxi door and they went scurrying toward Fifth Avenue. "Well, it's right here, see!"—and as he spoke he drew

a roll of bills from his capacious trousers-pocket. From an inner coat-pocket that buttoned with a flap he next took out a pig-skin wallet, and flicked the ends of his paper wealth before Durkin's widening eyes. The latter could see that it was made up of one hundreds, and fifties, and twenties, all neatly arranged according to denomination. He wondered, dazedly, just how many thousands it held. It seemed, of a sudden, to put a new and sobering complexion on things.

"Money talks!" was the older man's sententious remark, as he restored the wallet to its pocket.

"Undoubtedly!" said Durkin, leaning back in the cushioned seat.

"Now, if you want to swing in with us, here's what you get a week."

The stranger took the smaller roll from his trousers-pocket again, and drew out four crisp fifty dollar bills. These he placed on the palm of the other man's hand, and watched the hesitating fingers slowly close on them. "And if our *coup* goes through, you get your ten per cent. rake-off,—and that ought to run you up from five to seven thousand dollars, easy!"

Durkin's fingers closed more tightly on his bills, and he drew in his gin-laden breath, sharply.

"Who *are* you, anyway?" he asked, slowly.

"Me? Oh, I'm kind of an outside operator, same as yourself!"

He looked at Durkin steadily, for a moment, and then, seemingly satisfied, went on in a different tone.

"Did you ever hear of Penfield, the big pool-room man, the gay art connoisseur, who hob-nobs with a bunch of our Wall Street magnates and saunters over to Europe a couple o' times a season? Well, I've been a plunger at Penfield's now for two months—just long enough to make sure that he's as crooked as they make 'em. I'm going to give him a dose of his own medicine, and hit that gilt-edged gambler for a slice of his genteel bank-roll—and an uncommon good, generous slice, too!"

"But what's—er—your special line of business? How are you going to get at this man Penfield, I mean?"

"Ever hear of the Miami outfit?" asked the other.

"That cut in and hit the Montreal pool-rooms for eighty thousand?—well, I guess I have, a little!"

Durkin glanced at his companion, in wonder. Then the truth seemed to dawn on him, in one illuminating, almost bewildering, flash.

"You—you're not MacNutt?" he cried, reading his answer even while he asked the question. Half a year before, the Postal-Union offices had been full of talk of the Miami outfit and MacNutt, buzzing with meagre news of the cool insolence and audacity of Miami's lightning-slingers, who, when they saw they had worked their game to a finish, cut in with their: "We've got your dough, now you can go to——" as they made for cover and ultimate liberty ten minutes before their hillside cave was raided, and nothing more

than a packing-case, holding three dozen Brumley dry batteries, a bunch of "KK," and a couple of Crosby long-distance telephones, was found.

Durkin looked at the other man once more, almost admiringly, indeterminately tempted, swayed against his will, in some way, by the splendor of a vast and unknown hazard. He found a not altogether miserable consolation, too, in the thought that this possible second dip into illegitimate activities would be a movement not directed against organized society, but against one already an enemy of that society. Yet even this draught of sophistry left its after-taste of disgust.

"You're pretty confidential," he said, slowly, looking the other up and down. "What's to stop me going to one of Doogan's men and squealing on the whole gang of you?"

MacNutt smiled, gently and placidly, and stroked his short beard, touched here and there with gray. "And what good would all that do you?" he asked.

"You *are* a cool specimen!" ejaculated the other.

"Oh, I guess I know men; and I sized you up, first thing, in the court-room. You're the sort o' man I want. You're not a funker, and you've got brains, and—well, if you don't come out of this quite a few thousand to the good, it's all your own fault!"

Durkin whistled softly. Then he looked meditatively out at the flashing motor-cars as they threaded their way up the crowded avenue.

"Well, I guess I'm game enough," he said, hesitatingly, still trying to sweep from his brain the clouding mental cobweb that it was all nothing more than a vivid nightmare.

"I guess I'm your man," he repeated, as they turned off the Avenue, and drew up in front of a house of staid and respectable brownstone facing, like so many of the other private houses of New York's upper Forties. In fact, the long line of brownstone edifices before him seemed so alike that one gigantic hand, he thought, might have carved the whole block from a single slab of that dull and lifeless-looking brownstone rock.

Then, following MacNutt, he jumped out and went quickly up the broad stone steps.

"So you're with us, all right?" the older man asked, as his finger played oddly on the electric button beside the door. Durkin looked at the blank glass and panels that seemed to bar in so much mystery, and his last quaver of indecision died away. Yet even then he had a sense of standing upon some Vesuvian-like lava-crust, beneath which smouldered unseen volcanic fires and uncounted volcanic dangers.

"Yes, I'm with you, anyway," he asserted, stoutly. "I'm with you, to the finish!"

CHAPTER II

IT WAS a full minute before the door swung open; and the unlooked-for wait in some way keyed the younger man's curiosity up to the snapping point. As it finally opened, slowly, he had the startled vision of a young woman, dressed in sober black, looking half timidly out at them, with her hand still on the knob. As he noticed the wealth of her waving chestnut hair, and the poise of the head, and the quiet calmness of the eyes, that appeared almost a violet-blue in contrast to the soft pallor of her face, Durkin felt that they had made a mistake in the house number. But, seeing MacNutt step quickly inside, he himself awkwardly took off his hat. Under the spell of her quiet, almost pensive smile, he decided that she could be little more than a mere girl, until he noticed the womanly fullness of her breast and hips and what seemed a languid weariness about the eyes themselves. He also noted, and in this he felt a touch of sharp resentment, the sudden telepathic glance that passed between MacNutt and the woman; a questioning flash on her part, an answering flash on the other's. Then she turned to Durkin, with her quiet, carelessly winning smile, and held out her hand,—and his heart thumped and

pounded more drunkenly than it had done with all MacNutt's bootlegger's gin. Then he heard MacNutt speaking, quietly and evenly, as though talking of mere things of the moment.

"This is Mr. Jim Durkin; Durkin, this is Miss Frances Candler. You two're going to have a lot o' trouble together, so I guess you'd better get acquainted right here—might as well make it Frank and Jim, you two, for you're going to see a mighty good deal of one another!"

"All right, Jim," said the woman, girlishly, in a mellow, English contralto voice. Then she laughed a little, and Durkin noticed the whiteness of her fine, strong incisors, and straightway forgot them again, in the delicious possibility that he might hear that soft laughter often, and under varied circumstances. Then he flushed hot and cold, as he felt her shaking hands with him once more. Strangely sobered, he stumbled over rugs and polished squares of parquetry, after them, up two flights of stairs, listening, still dazed, to MacNutt's hurried questions and the woman's low answers, which sounded muffled and far away to him, as though some impalpable wall separated them from him.

A man by the name of Mackenzie, Durkin gathered from what he could hear of their talk, had been probing about the underground cable galleries for half a day, and had just strung a wire on which much seemed to depend. They stopped before a heavy oak-panelled

door, on which MacNutt played a six-stroked tattoo. A key turned, and the next moment a middle-aged man, thin-lipped, and with blue veins showing about his temples, thrust his head cautiously through the opening. The sweat was running from his moist and dirt-smeared face; a look of relief came over his features at the sight of the others. Durkin wondered just why he should be dressed in the peaked cap and blue suit of a Consolidated Gas Company inspector.

The room into which they stepped had, obviously, once been a sewing-room. In one corner still stood the sewing-machine itself, in the shadow, incongruously enough, of a large safe with combination lock. Next to this stood a stout work-table, on which rested a box relay and a Bunnell sounder. Around the latter were clustered a galvanometer, a 1-2 duplex set, a condenser, and a Wheatstone bridge of the Post-Office pattern, while about the floor lay coils of copper wire, a pair of lineman's pliers, and a number of scattered tools. Durkin's trained eye saw that the condenser had been in use, to reduce the current from a tapped electric-light wire; while the next moment his glance fell on a complete wire-tapping outfit, snugly packed away in an innocent enough looking suit-case. Then he turned to the two men and the woman, as they bent anxiously over the littered table, where Mackenzie was once more struggling with his instrument, talking quickly and tensely as he tested and worked and listened.

"Great Scott, Mack, it's easy enough for you to talk, but it was fool's luck, pure fool's luck, I ever got this wire up! First, I had forty feet of water-pipe, then eighty feet o' brick wall, then over fifty feet of cornice, and about twice as much eave-trough, hangin' on all the time by my eyelashes, and dog-sick waitin' to be pinched with the goods on! Hold on, there—what's this?"

The sounder had given out a tremulous little quaver; then a feeble click or two; then was silent once more.

"Lost it again!" said Mackenzie, under his breath.

"Let me look over that relay a minute!" broke in Durkin. It was the type of box-relay usually used by linemen, with a Morse key attached to the base-board; and he ran his eye over it quickly. Then, with a deft movement or two he released the binding of the armature lever screws, and the next moment the instrument felt the pulse of life, and spoke out clearly and distinctly. Mackenzie looked up at the newcomer, for the first time, with an actual and personal interest.

"That's the trick, all right!" he said, with an admiring shake of the head.

"Listen," Durkin cried, gleefully, however, holding up a finger. "That's Corcoran, the old slob! He's sending through the New Orleans returns!" And he chuckled as he listened with inclined ear.

"That's Corcoran, same old slob as ever!" And still again he chuckled, a little contemptuously, with

the disdain of the expert for the slovenly sender. He remembered, with a touch of pride, his own sending three years before at the Kansas City Telegraphers' Convention, and the little cheer that broke from the audience in the great hall as he left the test table. It was not at his mere speed they had cheered, for he could do little more than forty-five words a minute, but because, as the chairman had later said, it was so clean-cut and neat and incisive—"as pure as a Rocky Mountain trout stream!"

"There they are!" said Mackenzie.

The four silent figures leaned a little closer over the clicking instrument of insensate brass—leaned intent and motionless, with quickened breathing and dilated nostrils and strangely altering faces, as though they were far from a quiet little back sewing-room, and were indeed beholding vast issues and participating in great efforts.

"We've got 'em, at last!" said MacNutt, quietly, mopping his face and pacing the little room with feverish steps.

"Yes, we've got 'em!" echoed Mackenzie, jubilantly.

Frances Candler, the woman, said nothing. But Durkin could feel her breath playing on the back of his neck; and when he turned to her he could see by her quick breathing and widened pupils that she, too, had been reading the wire. And again he wondered, as he looked at her wide forehead and those warm yet firm lips in which he could see impulsiveness still

waywardly lurking, how she ever came to such a place. To Durkin—who had heard of woman bookies and sheet-writers and touts in his day—she seemed so soft, so flower-like, in her pale womanhood, that she still remained to him one of the mysteries of a mysterious day.

The woman saw the play of the quicker thought on his face, and the impetuous warmth in his eyes as he gazed up at her, still half-timidly. And seeing it, she looked quickly away.

"No goo-gooin' there, you folks," broke in MacNutt, brusquely. As he was turning hurriedly away he looked back for a hesitating moment, from Durkin to the woman, and from the woman to Durkin again. If he was about to say anything further on the point to them, he changed his mind before speaking, and addressed himself once more to Mackenzie.

"Now, Mack, we've got to get a move on! Get some of that grime off, and your clothes on, quick!" Then he turned back to the other two at the operating table.

"I've certainly got a couple o' good-lookers in you two, all right, all right!" he said, Durkin thought half mockingly. "But I want you to get groomed up, Durkin, so's to do justice to that Fifth Avenue face o' yours! Better get rigged out complete, before trouble begins, for you're goin' to move among some lot o' swell people. And you two've got to put on a lot o' face, to carry this thing through."

Durkin laughed contentedly, for his eyes had just been following the line of the woman's profile.

"Remember," continued MacNutt, crisply, "I want you two to do the swell restaurants—in reason, of course, in reason!—and drive round a good deal, and haunt the Avenue a bit, and push through the Waldorf-Astoria every day or two, and drop in at Penfield's lower house whenever you get word from me. You'd better do the theatres now and then, too—I want you to be seen, remember,— but always *together!* It may be kind o' hard, not bein' able to pick your friend, Durkin, but Frank knows the ropes, and how much not to spend, and what to fight shy of, and who to steer clear of—and I guess she can explain things as you go along."

He turned back once more, from the doorway.

"Now, remember,—don't answer that 'phone unless Mack or me gives the three-four ring! If she rings all night, don't answer! And 'Battery Park,' mind, means trouble. When you're tipped off with that, get the stuff in the safe, if you can, before you break away. That's all, I guess, for now!" And he joined the man called Mack in the hall, and together they hurried downstairs, and let themselves out, leaving Durkin and his quiet-eyed colleague alone.

He sat and looked at her, dazed, bewildered, still-teased by the veil of unreality which seemed to sway between him and the world about him. It seemed to him as though he were watching a hurrying, shifting

drama from a distance,—watching it as, in his early days in New York, he used to watch the Broadway performances from his cramped little gallery seat.

"Am I awake?" he asked weakly.

Then he laughed recklessly, and turned to her once more, abstractedly rubbing his stubbled chin, and remembering to his sudden shame that he had gone unshaved for half a week. Now that MacNutt was away he hoped to see her in her true light. Some mere word or posture, he thought, would brush the entire enigma away.

"*Am* I awake?" he repeated, pushing his hand up through his hair. He was still watching her for some betraying touch of brazenness. He could be more at ease with her, he felt, when once she had reconciled herself with her uncouth surroundings, through the accidental but inevitable touch of vulgarity which was to establish what she really was.

"Yes; it is all very real!" she laughed quietly, but restrainedly. For the second time he noticed her white, regular teeth, as she hurried about, straightening up the belittered room.

During his narrow and busy life Durkin had known few women; never before had he known a woman like this one, with whom destiny had so strangely ordained that he should talk and drive and idle, work and watch and plot. He looked once more at her thick, tumbled chestnut hair, at the soft pallor of her oval cheek, and the well-gowned figure, as she stooped over a con-

denser,—wondering within himself how it would all end, and what was the meaning of it.

"Well, this certainly does beat me!" he said, at last, slowly, yet contentedly enough.

The young woman looked at him; and he caught a second glimpse of her wistfully pensive smile, while his heart began to thump, in spite of himself. He reached out a hesitating hand, as though to touch her.

"What is it?" she asked, in her mellow English contralto.

"I don't exactly know," he answered, with his hand before his eyes. "I wish you'd tell me."

She came and sat down in a chair before him, pushing back her tumbled hair with one hand, seeming to be measuring him with her intent gaze. She appeared in some way not altogether dissatisfied with him; it seemed almost as if she had taken his face between her two hands, and read it, feature by feature.

"I hardly know where to begin," she hesitated. "I mean, I don't know how much they've explained to you already. Indeed, there's a great deal I don't understand myself. But, of course, you know that we have tapped Penfield's private wire."

He nodded an assenting head toward the little brass sounder.

"And, of course, you are able to judge why. He gets all the race returns at the club house, and then sends them on by private 'phone to his other two pool-rooms. He has to do it that way, now that New York

is not so open, and ever since the Postal-Union directors pretended to cut out their sporting service."

Durkin knew all this, but he waited for the sake of hearing her voice and watching the play of her features.

"Every track report, you know, comes into New York by way of the race department of the Postal Union on lower Broadway. There, messenger boys hurry about with the reports to the different wire-operators, who wire the returns to the company's different subscribers. Penfield, of course, is really one of them, though it's not generally known."

"And always most astutely denied," scoffed Durkin.

"Many things are astutely denied, nowadays, when a great deal of money comes out of them," she said, wearily.

"But what have you and I to do with all this?" he broke in.

"Quite enough! You see, there's a delay of fifteen minutes, naturally, in getting a result to the pool-rooms. That gives us our chance; so, we hold up the message here, 'phone it at once over to MacNutt's rooms, three doors from Penfield's, and, when he has had time to drop in, as it were, and place his money, we send through our intercepted message."

"Then Penfield has no idea who or what MacNutt is?"

"He knows him only as a real estate agent with a

passion for plunging, a great deal of money, and—and—" The girl shrugged a rounded shoulder, flushed a little, and did not finish.

"And you know him as—?" suggested Durkin.

"That lies outside the area of essential information," she answered, with her first show of animation.

"But you?" Durkin persisted. She met his eyes, but she refused to deal with his cross-questioning. He was still waiting for that betraying sign which was to conjure away the enigma. Yet he rejoiced, inwardly, at the thought that it had not come.

"Both you and I shall have to drop in, on certain days, and do what we can at Penfield's lower house, while Mackenzie is doing the Madison Avenue place. We've been going there, on and off, for weeks now, getting ready for—for this!"

"Then MacNutt's been working on this scheme for a long while?"

"Yes, this house has been rented by the month, furnished, just as you see it, simply because it stood in about the right place. We have even lost a few hundred dollars, altogether, in Penfield's different places. But, in the end, the three of us are to hit Penfield together, on a ragged field, when there's a chance for heavy odds. But, of course, we can do it only once!"

"And then what?" asked Durkin.

Again the girl shrugged a shoulder.

"Penfield's patrons are all wealthy men," she went

on, in a sort of pedagogic explicitness. "The betting, particularly at the upper house, is always very heavy. A book of a hundred thousand dollars is common enough; sometimes it goes up to two or three hundred thousand. So, you see, it all depends on our odds. MacNutt himself hopes to make at least a hundred thousand. But then he has worked and brooded over it all so long, I don't think he sees things quite clearly now!"

It was her first shadow of reflection on their chief, and Durkin caught up the cue.

"He seems sharp enough still, to leave you and me here, to take all the risk in a raid," he protested.

"Yes," she assented, with the touch of weariness that came into her voice at times. "He is shrewd and sharp—shrewder and sharper than you would dare believe."

"And of course you understand your risk, now, here, from this moment on?"

"Yes, I quite understand it," she answered, with unbetraying evenness of voice.

His fingers were toying nervously with a little magnetic "wire finder."

"How in heavens did *you* ever get mixed up with —with—in this sort of thing?" Durkin at last demanded, exasperated into the immediate question. He turned on her quickly, as he asked it, and the eyes of the two met, combatively, for a moment or two. It was the girl who at last looked away.

"How did *you?*" she asked, quietly enough. She was strangely unlike any woman bookie he had seen or heard of before.

"Oh, me,—I'm different!" he cried, deprecatively. For some subtle reason she went pale, and then flushed hot again.

"You're—you're not MacNutt's wife?" he asked her, almost hopelessly.

She moved her head from side to side, slowly, in dissent, and got up and went to the window, where she gazed out over the house-tops at the paling afternoon.

"No, I'm not his wife," she said, in her quiet contralto.

"Then why won't you tell me how you got mixed up in this sort of thing?"

"It's all so silly and so commonplace," she said, without turning to look at him.

"Yes?" he said, and waited.

She wheeled about and wrung out with a sudden passionate "Oh, what's the good of all this! I am here tapping wires, and you are here doing the same. Neither of us belongs at this sort of work, but—but, we're here!"

"Can't you tell me?" he asked, more gently, yet inwardly more dogged.

"Yes, I *shall* tell you," she answered him, at last. "It began, really, six years ago when my mother died, in London, and my father went to pieces, went piti-

fully to pieces, and had to give up his profession as a barrister. I felt sorry for him, and stayed with him, through his months of drunkenness, and his gradual downfall. He started a little office for genealogical research—as we called it—digging up pretentious alliances, and suitable ancestors for idle and wealthy nobodies. This was bad enough, but little by little it degenerated into a sort of next-of-kin agency, and wrung its money from the poor, instead of the rich!"

She paused for a moment, before she went on, gazing at the man before her in grim and terrible candor, steeled with the purpose to purge her soul of all she had to say, and have it over and done with.

"But I stayed with father, through it all. I told myself I could live it down, the squalor, and the meanness, and the deceits, and even the drunkenness—I stayed with him because I pitied him. Even then he was a brilliant man. And I would have worked and fought for him to the end, only, at last, he wanted me to pose as a claimant for an estate then in chancery. *That* I would not and could not do. I went to Reading, and became an invalid's companion. Then, after father's death—after his horrible death—his older brother, at Oxford, offered to give me a home. He was an old man, a curate with five daughters, and I felt, then, that it would be unjust. So I answered an advertisement in a London paper, and came to America to be a governess in a New York family, in the house of a diamond importer named Ottenheimer. At the

end of my first week there my mistress unjustly suspected me of—Oh, I can't explain it all to you here, but she was a vulgar and unscrupulous woman, and said I was too good-looking to be a governess, and discharged me without even a reference. I was penniless in two weeks, and would gladly have crept back to my uncle in Oxford, if I had been able. Then, when I was almost starving, I was glad enough to become the secretary of an investment company, with an office in Wall Street. They had trouble with the Post-Office department in Washington, and then the police raided the office, for it turned out to be nothing more than a swindling scheme. . . . And then, oh, I don't know, I seemed to drift from one thing to another, until I was the English heiress in a matrimonial bureau, and a French baroness in some foreign litigation scheme. But all the time I was only waiting to get enough money to creep back to Oxford. I kept telling myself that in a few weeks more I should be able to escape. I kept dreaming of it, until Oxford seemed to grow into a sort of sanctuary. But things went on and on, and still I waited."

"And then what?" demanded Durkin, startled at the rising note of self-hate in her feverish declamation.

"Then, at last, I thought I had escaped into honesty, even in America. But it was the same as before. I met MacNutt!"

"And then what?" Durkin's customarily careless shoulders were very upright.

"Oh, first it was a woman's get-rich-quick concern in Chicago; then a turf-investment office in St. Louis; then a matrimonial bureau of our own, until the police put a stop to it because of the post-office people; then it was chasing the circuit for a season; and, finally, this wire-tapping scheme!"

She looked at him, weary-eyed, hiding nothing, smiling hopelessly.

"They write to me, from time to time," she went on, more quietly, but none the less tragically. "My uncle's parish is just outside Oxford, a quiet little high-walled place full of flowers and birds. But he is getting very old, and there are six of them, five girls, and Albert, the youngest. Some day I shall go back and live with them—only, in some way, I grow more and more afraid to face them. So I search for excuses to send them money and gifts. They think I'm still a governess here, and I write lying letters to them, and tell them things out of my own head, things quite false and untrue! So, you see, I've been nothing but cowardly—and—and wicked, from the first!"

"And is that all?" demanded Durkin, not trusting himself to show one jot of feeling.

"Yes," she answered, drearily; "I think that is all."

"But you're—you're too good for all this!" he cried impetuously, indignantly. "Why don't you break away from it, at once?"

"I'm going to,—some day! I've always waited,

though, and everything has dragged on and on and on, and I've been half afraid of MacNutt—he's the type of man, you know, who never forgives a person—and half-afraid of myself. But, some day—"

"Oh, I know what it's like," cried Durkin, drawn toward her, strangely nearer to her, in some intangible way. She read the sudden look on his face, and blushed under it, almost girlishly, once more.

"I want to rest, and be quiet, and live decently, away from the world, somewhere," she said dreamily, as though speaking only to herself.

Durkin walked to the window where she stood, checked himself, strode back to the relay on the work-table, and looked at the huddled instruments, absently.

"So do I," he said, earnestly, with his heels well apart.

"Do you?" she asked. He went over to where she stood.

"Yes, and I mean to," he declared, determinedly, turning with her to look at the gathering twilight of the city, and then lapsing into awkward silence once more.

CHAPTER III

MORE than once, during the feverish, kaleidoscopic days that followed, Durkin found himself drawing aside to ask if, after all, he were not living some restless dream in which all things hung tenuous and insubstantial. The fine linen and luxury of life were so new to him that in itself it half intoxicated; yet, outside the mere ventral pleasures of existence, with its good dinners in quiet *cafés* of gold and glass and muffling carpets, its visits to rustling, dimly-lighted theatres, it drives about the open city, its ever-mingled odors of Havana and cut flowers,—there was the keener and more penetrating happiness of listening to the soft English voice of what seemed to him a bewilderingly beautiful woman.

She was that, at least to him; and Durkin was content to let the world think what it liked. He found work to be done, it is true,—rigorous and exacting work while it lasted, when the appointed days for holding up Penfield's despatches came around. But the danger of it all, for some reason, never entered his mind, as he sat over his instrument, reading off the horses to the woman at his side, who, in turn, repeated them over the telephones, in cipher, to Mac-

Nutt and Mackenzie; and then, when the time allowance had elapsed, cutting in once more and sending on the intercepted despatches, even imitating to a nicety the slip-shod erratic volubility of Corcoran's "blind send."

Once only did a disturbing incident tend to ruffle the quiet waters of Durkin's strange contentment. It was one afternoon when Mackenzie had been sent in to make a report, and had noticed certain things to which he did not take kindly, Durkin thought.

"I'm not saying anything," he blurted out, when they were alone, "but don't you let that woman make a fool of you!"

"You shut up about that woman!" retorted Durkin, hotly. Then, imagining he saw some second and deeper meaning in the other's words, he caught him by the lapel of the vest, and held him against the wall.

"You *are* saying something, you hound! What do you mean by that, anyway?" he cried, with a white face. The man against the wall could see that a word would bring the onslaught, but he was used to trouble of that sort, and many a keener menace. So he only laughed contemptuously, with his shoulders up, as he pulled the other's fingers from his throat.

"You damned lobster, you!" he said, going off on the safer tack of amiable profanity. Then feeling himself free once more, his old bitter audacity proclaimed itself.

"You fool, you, don't you know that woman's been—"

But here the entrance of the girl herself put a stop to his speech. Yet, troubled in spirit as some currish and unspoken insinuation left him, Durkin breathed no word to the girl herself of what had taken place, imperiously as she demanded to know what Mackenzie had been saying.

On the day following, as MacNutt had arranged, the two paid their first visit to Penfield's lower house, from which Durkin carried away confused memories of a square-jawed door-keeper—who passed him readily enough, at a word from the girl—of well-dressed men and overdressed women crowded about a smoke-wreathed, softly lighted room, one side of which was taken up with a blackboard on which attendants were feverishly chalking down entries, jockeys, weights and odds, while on the other side of the room opened the receiving and paying-tellers' little windows, through which now and then he saw hurrying clerks; of bettors excitedly filling in slips which disappeared with their money through the mysterious pigeon-hole in the wall; of the excited comments as the announcer called the different phases and facts of the races, crying dramatically when the horses were at the post, when they were off, when one horse led, and when another; when the winner passed under the wire; of the long, wearing wait while the jockeys were weighing in, and of the posting of the official returns, while the lucky ones

—faded beauties with cigarette-stained fingers, lean and cadaverous-looking "habituals," stout and flashy-looking professionals, girlish and innocent-looking young women, heavy dowagers resplendent in their morning diamonds,—gathered jubilantly at the window for their money. The vaster army of the unlucky, on the other hand, dropped forlornly away, or lingered for still another plunge.

Durkin found it hard, during each of these brief visits, to get used to the new order of things. Such light-fingered handling of what, to his eyes, seemed great fortunes, unstrung and bewildered him. He had never believed the newspaper story that when the District Attorney's men had broken open a gambling-house safe a few months before, they had found deposited there a roll of greenbacks amounting to over three-quarters of a million dollars. That story now seemed likely enough. Yet, with him, the loss of even a hundred dollars on a horse, although not his own money, in some way depressed him for the day. Frances Candler picked her winners, however, with studious and deliberate skill, and, though they bet freely, it was not often that their losses, in the end, were heavy.

She had no love for this part of the work; and in this Durkin heartily agreed with her.

"The more I know of track-racing and its army of hangers-on," he declared to her, "the more I hate it, and everything about it! They say there are over

fifty thousand men in the business, altogether—and you may have noticed how they all—the owners and the bigger men, I mean—dilate on their purpose of 'improving the breed of the thoroughbred'—but to my mind, it's to improve the breed of rascality!"

He noted her habitual little head-shake as she started to speak.

"Yes, I think more unhappiness, more wrecked lives and characters, more thieves and criminals, really come from the race-track than from all the other evils in your country. It's not the racing itself, and the spectacular way of your idle rich for wasting their money! No, it's not that. It's the way what you call the smaller fry cluster about it, so cruelly and mercilessly 'on the make,' as they put it, and infect the rest of the more honest world with their diseased lust for gain without toil. I have watched them and seen them. It is deadly; it stifles every last shred of good out of them! And then the stewards and the jockey clubs themselves try to hide the shameful conditions of things, and drape and hang their veil of lies and hyprocrisy and moral debauchery over these buzzing clouds of parasites; and so it goes on! For, indeed, I know them," she ended, bitterly. "Oh, I know them well!"

Durkin thought of the four great Circuits, Eastern, Southern, Western, and Pacific slope, of the huge and complicated and mysteriously half-hidden gambling machinery close beside each great centre of American

population, New York and Washington, Chicago and St. Louis, Memphis and New Orleans, where duplicity and greed daily congregate, where horses go round and round in their killing and spectacular short-speed bursts, and money flashes and passes back and forth, and portly owners sit back and talk of the royal sport, as they did, Durkin told himself, in the days of Tyre and Rome. But day by day, with the waning afternoon, the machinery comes to a stop, the sacrificial two-year-olds are blanketed and stabled, the grandstands disgorge their crowds, and from some lower channel of the dark machine drift the rail-birds and the tipsters, the bookmakers and touts, the dissolute lives and the debauched moral sensibilities, the poolroom feeders and attendants in the thick of the city itself, the idlers and the criminals.

The thought of it filled him with a sudden emotional craving for honesty and clean-living and well-being. He rejoiced in the clear sunlight and the obvious respectability of the Avenue up which they were walking so briskly—for about Frances Candler, he had always found, there lurked nothing of the subterranean and morbidly secretive. She joyed in her wholesome exercise and open air; she always seemed to be pleading for the simplicities and the sanities of existence. She still stood tantalizingly unreconciled, in his mind, to the plane of life on which he had found her.

It was one night after a lucky plunge on a 20 to 1 horse had brought him in an unexpected fortune of

eighteen hundred dollars, that Durkin, driving past Madison Square through the chilly afternoon of the late autumn, with a touch of winter already in the air, allowed his thoughts to wander back to what seemed the thin and empty existence as a train-despatcher and a Postal-Union operator. As he gazed out on the closed cars and the women and the lights, and felt the warmth of the silent girl at his side, he wondered how he had ever endured those old, colorless days. He marvelled at the hold which the mere spectacular side of life could get on one. He tried to tell himself that he hated the ill-gotten wealth that lay so heavy and huge in his pocket at that moment; and he smothered his last warmth of satisfaction with the phrase which she had used a few days before: "Their diseased lust for gain without toil." Then he tried to think of the life he was leading, with one figure eliminated; and the blankness of the prospect appalled him.

With a sudden impetuous motion he caught up her hand, where it lay idly in her lap, and held it close. She tried to draw it away, but could not.

"Everything seems so different, Frank, since I've known you!" he said, a little huskily.

"It's different with me, too!" she all but whispered, looking away. Her face, in the waning light, against the gloom of the dark-curtained taxi-cab, looked pale, and, as he had so often felt, almost flowerlike.

"Frank!" he cried in a voice that started her breathing quickly. "Won't you—won't you marry me?"

She looked at him out of what seemed frightened eyes, with an unnatural and half-startled light on her pale face.

"I love you, Frank, more than I could ever tell you!" he went on, impetuously. "You could walk over me, you could break me, and do what you like with me, and I'd be happy!"

"Oh, you don't know me, you don't know me!" she cried. "You don't know what I've been!" And some agony of mind seemed to wrench her whole body.

"I don't care what you've been—I know what you *are!* You're the woman I'd give my life for—I'd lay it down, without a thought, for you! And, good Lord, look at me! Don't you think I'm bad enough myself—and a hundred times more weak and vacillating than you! I love you, Frank; isn't that enough?"

"No!" she mourned, "it's not enough!"

"But you've got to be loved, you want to be loved, or you wouldn't have eyes and a mouth like that! It's the only thing, now, that can make life worth while!"

She let him catch her up to his shoulder and hold her there, with her wet cheek against his; she even said nothing when he bent and kissed her on the lips, though her face grew colorless at his touch.

"I do love you," she sighed weakly. "I do love you! I do!" and she clung to him, childishly, shaken with a sob or two, happy, yet vaguely troubled.

"Then why can't we get away from here, somewhere, and be happy?"

"Where?" she asked.

"Anywhere, where there's daylight and honesty and fair play!"

"There's MacNutt!" she cried, remembering, opening her drooping eyes to grim life again. "He'd—he'd—" She did not finish.

"What's he to us?" Durkin demanded. "He hasn't bought our *souls!*"

"No, but we have to live—we have to work and pay as we go. And he could stop everything!"

"Let him interfere," cried the other, fiercely. "I've never been afraid of him! I'm as good a fighter as he is, by heaven! Just *let* him interfere, and he'll find his filthy money isn't everything!"

The woman at his side was silent. "I only wish I had a few of his thousands," added Durkin, more humbly.

She looked up quickly, with the flash of some new thought shadowed on her white face.

"Why *shouldn't* we?" she cried, half bitterly. "We have gone through enough for him!"

"And it's all rottenness, anyway," assuaged Durkin. "The Postal-Union directors themselves, who feed MacNutt and all his fry,—they make over four million a year out of their pool-room service! And one of them is a pillar of that church we passed, just above the Waldorf!"

"No, it's not that," she hesitated. She had long since grown afraid of that ancient sophistry.

"But why shouldn't we?" he persisted.

"Then we might go away somewhere," she was saying dreamily, "away to England, even! I wonder if you would like England? It always seems so much of yesterday there, to me. It's always tomorrow over here. But at home everything doesn't seem to live in the future, as we do now. I wonder if you would like England?"

"I'd like any place, where you were!"

"*He's* always been a welcher with the people he uses. He will be a welcher with you—yes, and with me, some day, I suppose."

She turned to Durkin with a sudden determination. "Would you risk it, with me?"

"I'd risk anything for you!" he said, taking her hand once more.

"We have a right to our happiness," she argued, passionately. "We have our life, all our life, almost—before us! And I've loved you, Jim," she confessed, her gloved fingers toying with a button on his sleeve, "from the first day MacNutt brought you up!"

Then a silence fell over her, and he could see the reflection of some strange conflict going on in her mind. Although he could perceive the unhappiness it brought to her, he could in no wise surmise the source of it, so that when she spoke again, the suddenness of her cry almost startled him.

"Oh, why didn't I know you and love you when I was a young and heart-free girl, singing and laughing

about my quiet home? Why couldn't love have come to me then, when all my heart and life were as white as the plain little cambric gown I wore—when I was worthy of it, and could have received it openly, and been glad of it!"

He could not follow her, but, lover-like, he tried to kiss away her vague fears and scruples. In this effort, though, he found her lips so cold and lifeless, that he drew away from her, and looked at her in wonder.

"*Is* it too late?" he implored, persistently.

CHAPTER IV

FOR all the calm precision with which Frances Candler had planned and mapped out a line of prompt action with Durkin, she was shaken and nervous and unstrung, as she leaned over the sounder, breathlessly waiting for the rest of the day's returns to come through on Penfield's wire.

Durkin, with two thousand dollars of his own and an additional eight hundred from her, had already plunged his limit at Penfield's lower house, on the strength of her tip over the 'phone. There was still to be one final hazard, with all he held; and at five o'clock they were to meet at Hartley's restaurant, and from there escape to a new world of freedom and contentment. But the fear of MacNutt still hung over her, as she waited—fear for certain other things besides their secret revolt on the very eve of their chief's gigantic coup. For she knew what MacNutt could be when he was crossed. So she leaned and waited and watched, listening with parted lips, wishing it was all over with, torn by a thousand indefinite fears.

Then, to her sudden terror, Mackenzie called her up sharply.

"Is that you, Frank?" he cried.

"Yes; what it it, Mack?" she asked back, calmly enough, but with quaking knees.

"Doogan's men are watching me here—they've got on to something or other. Cut this wire loose from outside, and get your 'phone out of sight. And, for heaven's sake, don't cut in on Penfield's wire. I've just tipped off MacNutt—he's off his dip, about it all. Look out for yourself, old girl!" he added, in a different tone of voice.

She rang off, feverishly, and vowed passionately that she *would* look out for herself. Catching up a pair of pliers, she cut the telephone wire from the open window, leaving two hundred feet of it to dangle forlornly over the little back house-courts. Then she ran to the door and locked and bolted it, listening all the while for the wire to speak out to her.

A minute later MacNutt himself rang up, and asked for Durkin. She made a movement as though to drop the receiver, and leave her presence unbetrayed; but the other had already heard her mellow "Hello?" of inquiry.

"What are *you* doing there?" he demanded, with a startled unsavory oath.

She tried to stammer out an adequate excuse, but he repeated his challenge. There was a moment's pregnant pause. Then he hissed one ugly word over the wire to the listening woman. Mackenzie had been hinting to him of certain things; now, he knew.

He did not wait even to replace the receiver. While

she still stood there, in the little sewing-room, white and dazed, he was in a swaying taxi, rattling and pounding nearer her, block by block.

He let himself in with his own pass-key, and raced up the long stairs, his face drawn, and a dull claret tinge. He found the door closed and bolted; he could hear nothing from within but the muffled clicking of the sounder as it ticked out the later New Orleans returns.

He paused for a moment, panting, but no answer came to his pound on the panels. He could spell out, in the dead silence, the names of the horses going over the wire.

"Open this door, by God, or I'll kill you!" he cried, in a frenzy, throwing the weight of his huge body against it in vain.

He seized an old-fashioned walnut arm-chair from the next room, and forced it, battering-ram fashion, with all his strength, against the oak panels. They splintered and broke, and under the second blow fell in, leaving only the heavier cross-pieces intact.

Quite motionless, waiting over the sounder, bent the woman, as though she had neither seen nor heard. "White Legs————Yukon Girl————Lord Selwyn"————those alone were the words which the clicking brass seemed to brand on her very brain. In three seconds she stood before the telephone, at the other end of which she knew Durkin to be waiting, alert for the first sound and movement. But she saw

the flash of something in the hand of the man who leaned in through the broken panel, and she paused, motionless, with a little inarticulate cry.

"Touch that 'phone, you welcher, and I'll plug you!" the man was screaming at her. His lip was hanging loose on one side, and his face, now almost a bluish purple, was horrible to look at.

"I've got to do it, Mack!" she pleaded, raising one hand to her face. He flung out a volley of foul names at her, and deliberately trained his revolver on her breast. She pondered, in a flash of thought, just what chance she would have at that distance.

"Mack, you wouldn't shoot *me,* after—after everything? Oh, Mack, I've got to send this through! I've got to!" she wailed.

"Stop!" he gasped; and she knew there was no hope.

"You wouldn't shoot me, Mack?" she hurried on, wheedlingly, with the cunning of the cornered animal; for, even as she spoke, the hand that hovered about her face shot out and caught up the receiver. Her eyes were on MacNutt; she saw the finger compress on the trigger, even as her hand first went up.

"Jim!" she called sharply, with an agony of despair in that one quick cry. She repeated the call, with her head huddled down in her shoulders, as though expecting to receive a blow from above. But a reverberation that shook shreds of plaster from the ceiling drowned her voice.

The receiver fell, and swung at full length. The

smoke lifted slowly, curling softly toward the open window.

MacNutt gazed, stupefied, at the huddled figure on the floor. How long he looked he scarcely knew, but he was startled from his stupor by the sound of blows on the street door. Flinging his revolver into the room, he stumbled down the heavily carpeted stairs, slunk out of a back door, and, sprawling over the court-fence, fell into a yard strewn with heavy boxes. Seeing a near-by door, he opened it, audaciously, and found himself in a noisy auction-room filled with bidders. Pushing hurriedly through them, he stepped out into the street, unnoticed.

When the wounded woman had made sure that she was alone—she had been afraid to move where she lay, fearing a second shot—with a little groan or two she tried to rise to her knees. She felt that there might still be time, if she could only crawl to the 'phone. But this, she found was beyond her strength. The left sleeve of her waist, she also saw, was wet and sodden with blood. She looked at it languidly, wondering if the wound would leave a scar. Already she could hear footsteps below, and again and still again she struggled to shake off her languor, and told herself that she must be ready when Durkin came, that he, at least, must not be trapped. She, as a mere pool-room stenographer, had little to fear from the law. But as she tried, with her teeth and her free arm, to tear a strip from her skirt, the movement, for

all her tight-lipped determination, was too much for her. She had a faint memory of hearing footsteps swarming about her, and then of ebbing and pulsing down through endless depths of what seemed to her like eider-downed emptiness.

When she came to, one of Doogan's men was leaning over her, with a glass of water in his hand. She could feel some of it still wet on her chin and waist-collar. She looked up at him, bewildered, and then from him to the other four men who stood about her. Then the events of the afternoon came back to her.

She closed her eyes again, vaguely wondering if some teasing, indeterminate mishap, which she could not quite remember, had yet come about. At first, she could not grasp it, as she lay there moaning with pain, the breeze from the open window blowing on her face. Then the truth came to her in a flash.

It was Durkin. He was coming back; and they were watching there, waiting to trap him. Again she told herself that she must keep her head, and be cool.

Without moving her head, she let her roving eyes take in the five men about her in the room; three of them, she knew, were plain-clothes men from the Central Office, the other two were Doogan's agents. If Durkin came while they were still there—and now he *could* not be long!—they would let him in, and of course say nothing, and there they would have him, like a rat in a trap.

She grew hysterical, and cried out to them that she was dying, yet waiting all the time for the sound of Durkin's step, trying to think how she might save him. At last, to her sudden joy, she remembered that he was to bring from her rooms her own hand-bag, filled with a few things she had gathered up to take away with her. He would surely carry that bag in with him when he came; that was her salvation.

She fell to shrieking again that she was dying, demanding shrilly why her doctor had not come. Through her cries, her alert ears heard the sound of voices at the street-door. It was Durkin, at last; he had spoken a word or two with the two plain-clothes men, who, she knew, would readily enough let him pass.

"Doctor!" she screamed, as she heard his steps on the stair. "Doctor! I'm dying, doctor! Are you never coming!"

She wondered, in her agony of mind and body, if he would be fool enough not to understand. *Would* he be fool enough?

Doogan's agents and the three plain-clothes men gathered about her silently, as they saw the intruder hurry in and drop on his knee beside the woman. "Is it you, doctor?" she wailed, with chattering teeth, shaking with an on-coming chill.

Durkin, in his dilemma, did not dare to look away from her face. He was blindly trying to grope his way toward what it all meant. The others stood

above him, listening, waiting for the least word. One of them moved to the open window, and closed it.

He bent lower, trying to read the dumb agony in the woman's face. Then another of the men went to the door, to guard it. Durkin could see the shoes and trousers-legs of the others, up to the knee. Each pair of boots, he noticed inconsequently, had a character and outline of their own. But still his frantic brain could not find the key to the enigma.

Then, out of the chaos and the disorder of the chattering of her teeth, seemed to come a hint, a whisper. She was sounding the double "i" of the operator about to "send"—she was trying to catch his attention, to tell him something, in Morse. He bent still closer, and fumbled artfully with the sleeve, wet and sodden with her warm blood.

He read the signal, as she lay there with chattering teeth: "All up—Get away quick—these are police—meet you in London—hotel Cecil—in two months—hurry."

"Where—write?" he implored her, by word of mouth, covering the question by shifting his busily exploring fingers from the wounded left shoulder to the right.

She closed her eyes. "C-N," she answered. She repeated it, in the strange Morse, weakly, and then fainted dead away.

Durkin dropped the sleeve he was carefully turning up. He looked at the men about him with a sudden

towering, almost drunken madness of relief, a madness which they took for sudden rage.

"You fools, you," he called at them. "You fools, couldn't you see it—this woman's dying! Here, you, quick—compress this artery with your thumb—hard, so! You, you—oh, I don't care *who* you are—telephone for my instruments—Doctor Hodgson, No. 29 West Thirtieth!"—luckily he remembered a throat doctor Frank had once consulted there—"and get me a sheet off one of the beds, quick!"

He tossed his hat into the hall, jerked up his cuffs, almost believing, himself, in the part he was acting.

"Water—where'll I get a water-tap?" he demanded, feverishly, running to the door. Outside the room, he suddenly kicked his hat to the foot of the back-stairs. He caught it as it rebounded from the second step, and bolted noiselessly up the stairway, never turning or looking back until he had gained the roof. There he crept, cat-like, across half-a-dozen houses, and slipped down the first fire-escape that offered.

At the third window, which was open, a stalwart Irish house-maid barred his progress. He told her, hurriedly, he was a fire-escape inspector for the City Department. Seeing that she doubted his word, he thrust a five dollar bill in her hand. She looked at it, laughed cynically—and time, he felt, was worth so much to him!—looked out at him again dubiously, and then in silence led him through the passage and down to the street-door.

As he turned hurriedly into Madison Avenue, toward the Grand Central station, he heard the clang of a bell, and saw an ambulance clatter down the street. Then, to make sure of it, he repeated her message to himself: "Hotel Cecil—two months—C-N."

For a moment or two the "C-N" puzzled him. Then he remembered that only the day before he had been telling her the episode of the Charleston earthquake, how every wire was "lost" after the final shock, and how every operator for hundreds of miles about, during the next day of line-repairing, kept calling "C-N" until an answer finally came from the debris of the dead city.

Through some trick of memory, he then knew, she had recalled the Morse signal for that southern city, in her emergency. There had been no time for thought, no chance for even momentary deliberation. "Charleston!" From that day the very name took on a newer and stranger meaning. He knew that during weeks of loneliness and wandering it would be the one city toward which his eyes and his heart would turn.

CHAPTER V

"TOMORROW for the States—for me England, and Yesterday,"—murmured Frances Candler as she stood at her window looking down over the tangle and tumult of the Strand. "For me, England and Yesterday!" she repeated, and it was not until she had said the lines twice over that she remembered how she had first copied them into her day-book, during her early homesick weeks in New York.

It was the lassitude of her week at sea, and the loneliness of her second week in a London hotel, she told herself, that had brought about the change. If there were deeper and more dormant reasons, she was content to let sleeping dogs lie. But she did not deceive herself as to the meaning of the move. It was more than flight; it was surrender. It was, indeed, the bitter and desperate remedy for a bitter and desperate condition. For, inappositely, on the very brink of what seemed the waiting and widening vista of all her life, she had decided to go back to Oxford and her uncle's home.

The steps that led to this determination were no longer clear to her questioning mind. She was also able, hour by brooding hour, to pile up against it ever

new objections. But she clung to it blindly, with a forlorn tenacity of spirit that swept aside all momentary issues and all dread of the future. For out of that seeming defeat, she contended, she would wring her belated and her inner victory, even while her active imagination, playing lambently ahead of dragging reality, showed her how painful would be that return to old conditions and outgrown surroundings.

For a woman who has known the world to go back to such a roof is always a sign and a confession of defeat. Yet the sweep of her aggressive young mind, once made up, flung blindly aside each half-accumulated bar of indecision.

But was it fair to them?—she suddenly demanded of herself, as she pictured the scenes and the faces that would confront her, the gentle and mild-mannered women, the venerable and upright-hearted curate, so jealous of equity and honor, with his unbending singleness and narrowness of outlook. And as she asked this question each familiar figure seemed to stalk grimly from its muffling childhood memories and confront her, a challenging sentinel at the very threshold of that quiet little home which she had dreamed as always open to her, as always a harbor of ultimate refuge.

But now, could she face the unspoken deceit, the daily attrition of it, month after month and year after year? For clearly she foresaw what her life would be, from sunrise to sunset, from youth to old age, from

the moment the quiet parsonage gate closed between her and the outer world. She foresaw it plainly, as distinctly and indelibly as though it had been set down in black and white before her eyes—the long and narrow and grimly defined path leading from a narrow and weather-beaten gate to a still narrower open grave. In summer time, in the quiet grounds behind the shielding gray walls, there would be the Provence roses to tend and the border-flowers to cut and trim, the sedate visiting and receiving, the frugal jam-making, the regular Bible-readings and the family prayers, the careful mending and remaking, the hemming of the clerical old-fashioned white cravats, the lonely cawing of the rooks through the quiet mornings and the long afternoons. And in the winter there would be the woollen jackets and cough mixtures to distribute throughout the parish, the stockings to be knit for the workhouse children, the long, silent games of chess in the mullion-windowed study, the lettering and numbering of the new books for the parish lending library, the pathetically threadbare suit of respectable broadcloth to press and repair, the summer linens and serges to be made over, the discussions of impending Disestablishment and the Deceased Wife's Sister Bill, the languid flow of life within doors and the gentle diversions of life without, punctuated by long Sundays, in gloomy high-partitioned pews with faded crimson cushions.

"Oh, it is useless! It is too late, now!" she cried,

hopelessly, as she paced the floor, and the weight of her past life hung heavy upon her. The roots of it lay too deep, she told herself, to be torn out. She was already too tainted with the dust of that outer world, too febrile, too passionately avid of movement and change. The contrast was too great. They would make it too hard for her, too rigidly exacting. For what did *they* know of the dark and complicated and compelling currents of the real world, lapped in their gentle backwaters of old-world clerical life, secluded and sheltered and untried! She would still have been one of them, if her paths had been theirs, if she had only breathed the quiet air they breathed!

"It is too hard!" she moaned, in her misery. The test of life itself was so crucial—that was the thought that kept recurring to her—the ordeal by fire was foredoomed to be so exacting! All their old lessons and creeds, which she had once chimed so innocently and so cordially, now seemed to fall empty and enigmatic on her older and wiser heart. They seemed to solve none of her imminent problems. Their mysticism only bewildered her. And she sat amid the roar of London, idle and sick at heart, unhearing and unseeing.

"I will do it!" she at last said aloud. "It will be my punishment!" She could no longer demand so much of life. She looked on existence, now, with older and disillusioned eyes. For what she had taken she must stand ready to pay. It would be her penance and penalty for past transgressions. And it would

have to be borne; it was obligatory. It was not happiness or well-being that was at stake, she argued, in that new mood of amendment; it was something vast and undying and eternal within her, something that came before happiness itself, something she had seen her defiant and broken and dying father ignore and surrender and suffer for.

While this new expiatory passion was still warm in her blood, she packed her boxes, soberly, and then as soberly wrote to Durkin. It was not a long letter, but she spent much time and thought in its composition. In it, too, she seemed to cast off her last vestige of hesitation. For she felt that the very note of impersonality in its unnatural stiffness of phrasing was a new means of support. It was a support as clumsy and retarding as a child's walking-chair, but she was willing enough to catch at it, whimsically, in those first tottering steps of renunciation.

"My Dear Jim," she began, after much hesitation, and with many long and thoughtful pauses as she wrote, "it will surprise you, I know, but I have decided to go back to Oxford—to the Oxford I have so often told you about. Do not think it is only cruelty on my part, or cowardice, or self-interest. I have thought over everything long and carefully. And it has led, always led, to one end—that end is: neither you nor I must go on leading the lives we have been leading! It will hurt me, and it will hurt you, I believe, to break the ties that time has made. But there is, to-

day, all the width of the Atlantic between us—and it is there, I think, that I am the coward. For it is only this that makes it possible for me to do what I'm doing. With you, I would bend to your will; here it will be easier. Now, above all things, both you and I must learn not to look on ourselves as beings apart from the rest of the world. If we have ever been enemies of society we must learn not to remember it —for it is this feeling, I know, which holds the key of our undoing. I have often wondered and looked to see in what ways I reproduced the atavistic conditions of the primitive woman—for they say that we evil doers are only echoes out of the past—but I'm going to do it no more. We are both of us ill-fitted for the things and the deeds we have drifted into. They make us suffer too much. It is work that should fall to souls dwarfed and stunted and benumbed. We are not morbid and depraved and blind; we have intelligence and feeling. We have only been unhappy and unlucky, let's say. So now we must fight along and wait for better luck, as you used to put it. We are not what they call 'recidivists.' We are not abnormal and branded; we must fight away the deadly feeling that we are detached from the rest of the world, that mankind is organized and fighting against us, that we are the hunted, and all men the hounds! What we have done, we have done. But I know that we were both initiated into wrong-doing so quietly and so insidiously that the current caught us before we knew

it. Yet I feel that I have none of the traits of the Female Offender, though in my anxiety and crazy search for causes and excuses I have even taken my cephalic index and tested my chromatic perception and my tactile sensitiveness and made sure that I responded normally to a Faraday current! Yes, we are both too normal to succeed happily in the ways we began. . . . I shall miss you, but I shall always love you. Oh, Jim, pray for me; as I, daily, shall pray for you! I can't write more now. Go back to your work, though it means being hungry and lonely and unhappy, fight out the problem of your amplifier, and struggle along with your transmitting camera, until you accomplish something we can both take pride in and be happy over! Sometime, later, when I write, I shall be able to explain everything more fully. . . . I was eleven days in the hospital, and crossed on the *Nieuw Amsterdam*. There will always be a scar—but a very small one—on my arm. That will be the only reminder. Good-bye, dear Jim, and God bless and keep you, always, in the right."

She read over the letter, slowly, dispassionately, and fought back the temptation to write further, to fling more of her true feeling into it. That, at best, would be only a cruel kindness.

As she folded and sealed the letter she felt that she was sealing down many years of her past youth. She already felt that she had passed over some mysterious Great Divide, that some vast morainic loop al-

ready walled her back from her former existence. And then, as a sudden, rushing sense of her isolation swept over her, she broke down, in that very hour of her ironic triumph, and wept miserably, passionately, hopelessly.

Her misery clung to her all that day, until, late in the afternoon, she caught the first glimpse of Oxford from her compartment window. At one touch it carried her back to the six long years of her girlhood, for she had been little more than a child when first taken from the dubious care of her father—and the happiest stretch of her life had been lived within sound of Oxford's tranquil bells.

It had been her first plan, when she left the train, to take a carriage and drive leisurely through the old university town. It would be her one hour of freedom, before crossing that final Rubicon; it was only, she protested, a human enough hesitation before the ultimate plunge. Vividly and minutely she remembered the town, as she had seen it from the familiar hills, wrapt in sunlight and purplish shadows by day, lying cool and dark and tranquil under the summer moon by night, steeped in the silences and the soft mistiness of the river valley, with here and there a bell tinkling and a roof glimmering through the gloom. She even used to say she found a strange comfort in the number of these bells and in the thought of their wakefulness throughout the night. But now, through some underground circuit of memory, they carried her

thoughts back to the clanging brilliance of Broadway at midnight, to the movement and tumult and press of light-hearted humanity. And by contrast, they now seemed to her to toll lugubriously. The quiet city about her seemed tainted with antiquity, autumnal, overshadowed by the grayness of death. It almost stifled her. She had forlornly hoped that the calm beauty of that town of bells and towers would still fall as a welcome balm on her torn feelings. But she had changed—oh, how she had changed! It was not, she told herself, the mere fruit of physical exhaustion. Her one desire on that day, indeed, was to reach that condition of bodily weariness which would render her indifferent to all mental blows. It was only her past, whimpering for its own.

She still felt the sheer need of fatigue to purge away that inner weariness that had settled over her soul, so on second thoughts she turned homeward, and went on foot, through the paling English afternoon. Often, as a girl, she had walked in over the neighboring hills; and there seemed something more in keeping with her return to go back alone, and quietly. And as she walked she seemed to grow indifferent to even her own destiny. She felt herself as one gazing down on her own tangled existence with the cool detachment of a mere spectator. Yet this was the landscape of her youth, she kept telling herself, where she had first heard nightingales sing, where she had been happy and hopeful and looked out toward the unknown world

with wide and wondering eyes. But the very landscape that once lay so large and alluring now seemed cramped and small and trivial. It seemed like a play-world to her, painted and laid out and overcrowded, like the too confining stage-scene of a theatre.

The afternoon was already late when the familiar square tower of the church and the gray walls of the parsonage itself came into view. She gazed at them, abstracted and exalted, and only once she murmured: "How different, oh, how different!"

Then she opened the gate of that quiet home, slowly and deliberately, and stepped inside. The garden was empty.

One great, annihilating sponge-sweep seemed to wipe five long years, and all their mottled events, from her memory. Then as slowly and deliberately she once more closed the gate. The act seemed to take on that dignity attaching to the ceremonial, for with that movement, she passionately protested to herself, she was closing the door on all her past.

CHAPTER VI

IT WAS one week later that Frances Candler wrote her second letter to Durkin. She wrote it feverishly, and without effort, impetuous page after page, until she came to the end. Then she folded and sealed it, hastily, as though in fear that some reactionary sweep of hesitation might still come between her and her written purpose.

"I was wrong—I was terribly wrong," was the way in which she began her letter. "For as I told you in my cable, *I am coming back.* It is now all useless, and hopeless, and too late. And I thought, when I was once away from you, that it would be easy to learn to live without you. But during these last few weeks, when I have been so absolutely and so miserably alone, I have needed and cried for you—oh, Jim, how I have needed you! I have learned, too, how even an inflexible purpose, how even a relentless sense of duty, may become more sinister than the blindest selfishness. It was cruel and cowardly in me—for as you once said, we must now sink or swim together. I forgot that you, too, were alone, that you, too, needed help and companionship, even more than I. And I had thought that morality and its geography, that mere

flight from my misdoings meant that they were ended, that here in some quiet spot I could be rid of all my past, that I could put on a new character like a new bonnet, that life was a straight and never-ending lane, and not a blind mole-run forever winding and crossing and turning on itself! I thought that I could creep away, and forget you, and what I had been, and what I had lived through, and what had been shown to me. But the world is not that easy with us. It defeats us where we least expect it; it turns against us when we most need it. I had always dreamed that my uncle's high-walled home at Oxford could be nothing but a place of quiet and contentment. I had always thought of it as a cloister, into which I could some day retire, and find unbroken rest and a solemn sort of happiness. Then came the revelation, the blow that cut the very ground from under my feet. *They* had their troubles and their sorrows, as well as I. Life could hang as dark for them as it hung for me. My cousin Albert, a mere boy, reading for the Bar in London, had a friend in the City named Singford. I will try to tell you everything as clearly and as briefly as possible. Young Singford is rather a black sheep, of an idle and wealthy family. He involved Albert in a stock-gambling scheme—oh, such a transparent and childish scheme, poor boy!—and Albert, in despair, went to his father. He had to have money to cover his losses; it would be paid back within the month. His father, the soul of uprightness, borrowed the money from

what was, I think, the Diocesan Mission Fund, in the belief that it would be promptly repaid. Then came the crash. I found them broken and dazed under it, helpless, hopeless, bewildered. It was so new to them, so outside their every-day life and experience! I went straight to London, and hunted up my cousin, who was actually talking about shooting himself. I found that young Singford, who had been sent down from Balliol, had blindly plunged with Albert on some foolish Texas Oil enterprise. I needn't tell you more, except that the whole sum was not quite two hundred pounds. But it meant Albert's giving up his study, and my uncle's disgrace. I straightened it out for the poor boy—it all seemed so easy and natural and commonplace for *my* practised hand!—and I believe I brought some little peace and comfort back to that crushed and despairing household. But it all means, of course, that now I'll have to go back to America. Still, whatever I may have to go through, or whatever happens to me, I shall always have the consolation of knowing that I made that one small sacrifice and did that one small kindness. But from the first I saw that my sanctuary was no longer a sanctuary. And when I saw that I should really have to go back, I was almost glad. The very thought of it seemed to give a new zest to life. I had been trying to tell myself that my future there would not be empty and lonely. But all along, in my secret heart of hearts, I knew better. I could not close my eyes to anticipation; I could not

shut activity out of my life. It seemed suddenly to people all my lonely future with possibilities, that first thought of going back. And then there was *you*. Yes, I believe all along that it was you I wanted. I tried to argue myself away from the feeling that I was deserting you, but I knew it was true. It was this feeling that saved me, that made me feel almost elated, when I saw that fate was once more flinging me into the life from which I had been fighting to escape. You don't know what the very word 'America' now means to me—it's like the shrill of a call-bell, it's like the double 'i' of our operating days, warning us to be ready! I want to go home; and home, now, is where you are. I can't entomb myself yet—I am too young. I want to live, Jim, I want to live! Those feverish years must have left some virus in my veins, some virus of recklessness and revolt. And there is so much to do, so many things are challenging us, waiting for us. I can not be satisfied with memories, and Yesterday. I want Tomorrow, and You! It may be blind, and wrong, and wicked—but, oh, Jim, the wires are all down between my head and my heart!"

CHAPTER VII

DURKIN sat at the restaurant table, smoking, his watch in his hand. It was already seven minutes to four. As the seventh minute slipped into the sixth, and the sixth into the fifth, some first vague sense of impending disaster stole over him.

"Is this seat taken, sir?"

It was a waiter speaking, with a short, florid man at his heels.

"Yes," said Durkin, quietly, "I'm expecting a lady—in five minutes."

The florid man bowed. The waiter said "Yes, sir," tipped the chair against the table edge, and went on in search of a seat.

Durkin smoked hard once more, relishing the touch of irony in it all. He did not, naturally enough, explain that the lady he was expecting had made the engagement three thousand miles away from the table at which he sat and at which he was to meet her precisely on the stroke of four. Such things were theatrical, and unnecessary; besides, one had to allow for accidents. And once more, with a puzzled brow, he took up his paper and looked through the *Majestic's* passenger list, still involuntarily cast down by a wayward sense of possible calamity.

He imagined some dark coalition of forces against him, obscurely depressed, for the moment, by the shadow of some immense, seemingly impassive, and yet implacable animosity of eternal rule toward the accidental revolter. The same vague feeling had possessed him that infelicitously happy day when, after abandoning his operator's key, he had become an "overhead guerrilla." Still later it had come to him, from time to time, as, dazzled by the splendor of that vast hazard which had ended in such disastrous triumph, he had revolted against MacNutt, and preyed on the preyer himself. He had begun to feel, and he had felt, from that time forward, that he was existing under a series of conditions other than those of the men about him. He was no longer one of them. He was out of the fold. He carried the taint of the pariah. He was, henceforth, however he might try, as Frances Candler had warned him, to muffle or forget it, a social anomaly.

To the consciousness of this he applied his customary balm, which lay in the thought that now the older creeds and ethics of life had crumbled away. The spirit which dominated America today, he felt, was that of the business man's code of morals; it was the test, not of right, but of might, as it flowered in intelligence and craftiness. And that first dubious victory, of his own, he argued with himself, had been one of intelligence—should not victory, then, always be with the alerter head and the warier hand? And this

vague and mysterious enemy whose emissaries, even though relentless, were always so temptingly dull—would they not always meet and clash, and the battle be to the strong?

A woman, dressed in black, with a dark veil caught up around the rim of her hat, pushed her way through the crowded restaurant toward the table in the corner. She might have passed for a mere girl, but for the heavy shadows about the weary-looking, violet eyes and the betraying fullness of her soberly gowned figure. She glanced at the clock, and smiled a little, with her calm, almost pensive lips, as she placed a pearl-gloved hand on the back of the tilted chair.

"I am on time, you see," she said, quietly in her soft contralto, as she sank into the chair with a contented sigh, and began drawing off her gloves. "It is precisely four o'clock."

Outwardly she appeared at ease, well-poised and unruffled. Only the quick rise and fall of her bosom and the tremulousness of her hands gave any sign of her inner agitation.

"Why—Frank!" cried Durkin, with eloquent enough inadequacy, his face paling a little, for all his own assumption of easy fortitude. He continued to look at her, a sudden lump in his throat choking back the hundred stampeding words that seemed clamoring to escape. He noticed, as he had so often noticed before, how rapid and easy were her movements, and how, through all her softness, she impressed one with a sense of her great muscular agility.

For one wavering moment she let her eyes lose their studied calmness, and, inwardly surrendering, gazed at him recklessly, abandonedly, with her very soul in her face.

"Is it safe here?" she murmured, as she drew her chair up.

He nodded. "As safe as anywhere," he was on the point of replying, but did not speak the words.

"Dearest!" she whispered to him, with her eyes still on his face, and her back to the crowded room.

He tried to seize her ungloved hand in his, but she drew him up with a sudden monitory "Hssssh!" Then he, too, remembered, and they took up their rôle of outward indifference once more.

"I had to come back, you see!" she confessed, with what seemed a shamed and mournful shake of the head.

"Something told me you would, all along, even after your first letter. I saw it, as surely as I see you now!"

"Oh, Jim, what I wrote you was true!—it showed me that we can't bury our past, in a day, or a week, or a month! It's made me afraid of myself and taught me how weak I am!"

And again she looked at him, across the quiet but abysmal gulf of her reawakening despair.

"But there is just where we make ourselves so unhappy—we're so afraid about being afraid! Life without some fear—what is it?"

"Oh, I am without defence!" she lamented, indeter-

minately and inconsequently. She sighed again, and still again gazed into his face with her shadowy and unhappy and seemingly hungry eyes. Then, with a sudden abandoning uptoss of her reckless hands, that seemed to fling both solemnity and memory from her, she laughingly declared that it was already too late to cry over spilt milk. Yet the sound of her careless laughter fell, in some way, more lugubriously on Durkin's ear than had all her earlier lamentation.

"But *why* did you ever write that first letter?" he persisted.

She knew she could not explain, satisfactorily. "It was the result of being lonesome, let's say, and perhaps being morbid, after my illness!"

Durkin called the waiter and gave him an order, puffing his cigar with assumed unconcern, while the woman murmured across the table to him: "You look quite foreign, with that magnificent Vandyke! And, by the way, how do you like my English bang?"

"Why, it's dyed!" said Durkin, for the first time missing the sunny glint in the familiar crown of chestnut.

"Jim," said the woman, in lower tones, sobering again, "there's trouble ahead, already!"

She drew her chair a little closer, and leaned forward, with her elbows on the table and her chin in her hands. Durkin lighted another cigar, and lounged toward her with the same careless pose, his face alert with new and different interest.

"MacNutt?"

"No, not him, thank heaven!"

"You don't mean Doogan's men?"

"Not so loud, dear! No, not Doogan's men, either. It's nothing like that. But tell me, quickly, has anything gone wrong over here?"

"Not a thing—except that you were away!"

"But hasn't *anything* happened since I saw you?"

"Nothing worth while—no. It's been so dull, so deadly dull, I all but jumped back into the old game and held up a Charleston pool-room or two! Five whole weeks of—of just waiting for you!"

She caught up her veil, where a part of it dropped down from her hat-rim, and smiled her wistfully girlish smile at him. Then she glanced carefully about her; no one seemed within earshot.

"Yes, I know. It seemed just as long to me, dearest. Only, because of several things, *I* had to jump into something. That's what I must tell you about—but we can't talk here."

"Then we'll have William call a taxi?"

She nodded her assent.

"We can talk there without having some one hanging over our shoulders."

"Do you know," she went on, as she watched the waiter push out through the crowded, many-odored room, "I often think I must have lived through the ordinary feelings of life. 'I mean that we have already taken such chances together, you and I, that

now only a big thing can stir me into interest. I suppose we've exhausted all the every-day sensations."

"Yes, I know the feeling," said Durkin, through his cigar-smoke. "I suppose it's really a sort of drunkenness with us now. I couldn't go back to the other things, any more than I could go back to—to stogies. All this last four weeks of hanging about I have felt like—oh, like a sailor who has pounded round every strange sea in the world, and has come home to be told not to go out of his own back yard."

"That's how I felt, towards the last, in London, with nothing to do, nothing to think about, or plan, or live for. I got so I nearly screamed every time I faced the four dull walls of that hotel room. But, you see we have both fallen back on the wrong sort of stimulant. After all, what I wrote you in that letter *was* true! Neither of us two should ever have been evil-doers. I am too—too much like other women, I suppose. And you're too thin-skinned and introspective—too much of a twentieth century Hamlet. You should never have tapped a wire; and I should never have been a welcher and robbed MacNutt. You ought to have gone on being a nice, respectable young train-despatcher, with a row of geraniums in front of your station window; and I ought to be a prim little branch-office telegrapher in one of those big Broadway hotel corridors, in a little wire cage, between the news-stand and the cigar-counter. Then we should both have a lot still to look for and to live for."

She broke off inconsequently, and gazed out through the lightly-curtained window, to where a street piano was throbbing out the waltz-tune of *Stumbling*.

"Do you remember our first days together?—the music and theatres and drives! Oh, what a happy four weeks they were!" And she gazed at him dreamily, as she hummed the tune of *Stumbling* in her throaty, low-noted contralto, ending with a nonchalant little laugh, as she looked up and said, "But here's our taxi, at last!"

In the half-light of the taxi-cab, as they turned into Fifth Avenue, and swung up toward Central Park, she let her tired body rest against his shoulder, with her arm clinging to him forlornly. There was a minute or two of silence, and then putting her face up to him, she said, with a sudden passionate calmness:

"Kiss me!"

He felt the moist warmth of her capitulating lips, the clinging weight of her inert body, and, deep down within his own consciousness he knew that, if need be, he could die for her as the purest knight might have died for some old-world lady of spotless soul and name.

Yet after all, he wondered, as he held her there, were they so irretrievably bad? Was it not only their game, this life they had drifted into?—their anodyne, their safeguard against exhausted desires and the corroding idleness of life?

She must intuitively have felt what was running

through his mind, as she slipped away from him, and drew back into her own corner of the taxi-cab, with a new look of brooding melancholy in her shadowy eyes.

"If I were ignorant and coarse, and debased, then I could understand it. But I'm not! I have always wanted to be honest. From the first I have longed to be decent."

"Your *are* honest, through and through," he protested. "You are as strong and true as steel."

She shook her head, but he caught her in his arms, and she lay there half-happy again.

"Oh, Frank, for the twentieth time," he pleaded, "won't you marry me?"

"No, no, no; not till we're honest!" she cried, in alarm. "I wouldn't dare to, I couldn't, until then."

"But we're only what we have been. We can't change it all in a day, can we—especially when there is so much behind?"

"I want to be decent," she cried, in a sort of muffled wail. "No, no; I can't marry you, Jim, not yet. We may not be honest with other people, but we *must* be honest with ourselves!"

One of the policemen directing the street-traffic at Forty-Second Street glanced in at them, through the misty window, and smiled broadly. It seemed to remind her of other worlds, for she at once sat up more decorously.

"Time! Time! we are losing time—and I have so much to tell you."

"Then give me your hand to hold, while you talk."

She hesitated for a half-laughing moment, and then surrendered it.

"Now, tell me everything, from the first!"

CHAPTER VIII

"IT'S the Blue Pear," she said, hesitatingly, wondering how to begin—"which, of course, means nothing to you."

"And just what *is* it, please?"

"The Blue Pear, Jim, is a diamond. It's a diamond that you and I, in some way or another, have got to get back!"

"To get back? Then when did we lose it?"

"*I* lost it. That's what I've got to tell you."

"Well, first tell me what it is," he said, wondering at her seeming gaiety, not comprehending her nervous rebound from depression to exhilaration.

"It's a very odd diamond, and a very big diamond, only tinted with a pale blue coloring the same as the Hope Diamond is tinged with yellow. That's how it came to get its name. But the odd thing about it is that, when it was cut in Amsterdam, rather than grind away a fifteen-carat irregularity, it was left in a sort of pear-shape. Even before it was mounted by Lalique, it sold in Paris for well over six thousand pounds. Later, in Rio de Janeiro, it brought something like seven thousand pounds. There it was given to a French actress by a Spanish-American coffee-king. It was an African stone, in the first place."

"But what's all this geography for?" asked Durkin.

"Wait, dear heart, and you'll understand. The coffee-king quarrelled with the Paris woman. This woman, though, smuggled the stone back to France with her. It was sold there, a few months later, for about one-fourth its market value. Still later it was bought for a little under six thousand pounds, by the late Earl of Warton, who gave it to his younger daughter, Lady Margaret Singford, when she married young Cicely—Sir Charles Cicely, who was wounded the first year of the war, you remember. Well, Sir Charles didn't like the setting—it had been made into a marquise ring of some sort—so he took it to Rene Lalique's work-shop in Paris. and had it mounted after his own ideas."

"But who is Lalique?"

"A French *l'art nouveau* goldsmith—the Louis Tiffany of the Continent. But I've a lot to tell you, Jim, and only a little time to do it in, so we shall have to cut out these details. Lalique made a pendant out of the Blue Pear, hung on a thin gold stem, between little leaves of beaten gold, with diamond dewdrops on them. Well, four weeks ago the Blue Pear was stolen from Lady Margaret's jewel case. No, Jim, thank you, not by me; but if you'll wait, I'll try to explain.

"I hardly know what made me do it—it was *ennui*, and being lonesome, I suppose. Perhaps it was the money,—a little. But, you see, when Albert, my in-

nocently wayward young cousin, got mixed up with young Singford, I found out a thing or two about *that* less innocent gentleman. It started me thinking; and thinking, of course, started me acting."

He nodded, as a sign that he was following her.

"I had detective-agency cards printed, and went straight to the Cicelys. Lady Margaret wouldn't see me; she sent down word that the reward of three hundred pounds was still open, and that there was no new information. But I saw her at last—I shan't explain just how. Before very long I found out something further, and rather remarkable—that Lady Margaret wanted to drop the case altogether, and was trying to blind Scotland Yard and the police. And that made me more determined.

"Before the end of the week, I found out that young Singford, Lady Margaret's brother, had been mixed up in a row at Monaco, had made a mess of things, later, at Oxford, and had decided to try ranching in the Canadian North-West. I had already booked my passage on the *Celtic,* but the whole thing then meant too much for me, and, when I found young Singford was sailing that week on the *Majestic,* I succeeded in getting a berth on that steamer. Jim, as soon as I saw that wretched boy on deck, I knew that I had guessed right, or almost right. Oh, I know them, I know them! I suppose it's because, in the last year or two, I have come in contact with so many of them. But there he was, as plain as day, a criminal with

stage-fright, a beginner without enough nerve to face things out. I rather think he may have been a nice boy at one time. And I know just how easy it is, once you make the first little wrong turn, to keep on and on and on, until you daren't turn back, even if you had the chance to."

"And you took pity on him?" inquired Durkin, "or did you merely vivisect him at a distance?"

"Not altogether—but first I must tell you of the second dilemma. Before we sailed, and the first day out, I thought it best to keep to my cabin. You can understand why, of course. After all, this is such a little world, when you know the Central Office might be after you!"

"Or some old business friend?"

"That was precisely what I thought, only a good deal harder, when I was sat down to dinner, the second day out, and glanced across the table. You remember my telling you about my first experiences in America, when I was a shrinking and pink-cheeked young English governess, and never knew a bold thought or a dishonest act? Do you remember my describing the woman—it's always a woman who is hard on another woman!—who accused me of—of having designs on her husband? Her husband, a miserable, oily little Hebrew diamond-merchant who twice insulted me on the stairs of his own house, when I had to swallow it without a word! Well, it was that woman who sat across the table from me. They had

put me at the Captain's table—my London gown, you see, looks uncommonly well. But there was that woman, a little more faded and wizened and wrinkled, looking at me with those beady old hawk eyes of hers; and I knew there was trouble ahead.

"A war-correspondent, who had been nice to me, had brought up about everybody at our table worth while, and introduced them to me, that night before going down. So, when I saw that yellow face and those hawk eyes, I knew I had to think hard and fast."

"'Are you not the young woman,' she said, in a sort of *frappé* of nasal indignation, 'are you not the young woman whom I once employed as a governess and discharged for misconducting herself with—er—with the other servants?'

"I was so busy trying to be cool that I didn't bother thinking out an answer. I did want to say, though, that it was not a servant, but her own devoted and anointed husband. I kept on talking to the Captain, deciding to ignore her icily. But that yellow hag deliberately repeated her question, and I heard the war-correspondent gasp out an indignant 'My God, madam!' and saw the Captain's face growing redder and redder. So I went on and asked the Captain if intoxication was becoming commoner on the high seas. Then she began to splutter and tremble. I kept looking at her as languidly as ever, and a steward had to help her away.

"But she knew that she was right. And she knew

that I knew she knew. Though I had all the men on my side, and the Captain cheerfully saw to it that she was moved down to the tail end of the Doctor's table, among the commercial travellers and the school-ma'ms, I knew well enough that she was only waiting for her chance.

"It didn't change the face of things, but it upset me, and made me more cautious in the way I handled young Singford. In some way, I felt a bit sorry for the poor chap, I thought a little sympathy might perhaps soften him, and make him tell me something worth while. But he had too much good old English backbone for that. And, although he told me I was the best woman he ever knew, and a little more solemn nonsense like that, I at last had to go for him very openly. It was a moonlight night—the sea-air was as soft as summer. We were standing by the rail, looking out over the water. Then I made the plunge, and very quietly told him I knew two things, that he had stolen his sister's diamond pendant, and that for three days he had been thinking about committing suicide.

"I watched his hand go up to his breast-pocket—the moon was on his terrified young face—and I came a little nearer to him, for I was afraid of something—I tried to tell him there was no use jumping overboard, and none whatever in throwing the Blue Pear into the Atlantic. That would only make things past mending, forever. Besides, he was young, and his life was still before him. I talked to him—well, I believe

I cried over him a little, and finally, without a word, he reached in under his coat, and there, in the moonlight, handed me the Blue Pear. I gave him my word of honor it would be taken back to his sister, and even lent him twenty pounds—and you can imagine how little I had left!"

Durkin looked up, as though to ask a question, but she silenced him with her uplifted hand.

"That was the night we came up the Bay. I slipped down to my cabin, and turned on the electric light. Then I opened the little case, and looked at my pendant. You know I never liked diamonds, they always seemed so cold and hard and cruel—well, as though the tears of a million women had frozen into one drop. But this Blue Pear—oh, Jim, it was beautiful!"

"It *was?*—Good heavens, you don't mean—?"

"Shhhh! No so loud! Yes, that is just it. There I stood trying it in the light, feasting on it, when a voice said behind me, a voice that made my hair creep at the roots, 'A very unsafe stone to smuggle, young lady!' And there, just inside my door, stood the yellow hag. She had stolen down, I suppose, to nose among my luggage a bit. I could have shaken her—I almost did try it.

"We stood staring at each other; it was the second battle of the kind between us on board that ship. I realized she had rather the upper hand in this one. I never saw such envy and greed and cruelty in a human face, as she ogled that stone.

"It seemed to intoxicate her—she was drunk to get her hands on it—and she had enough of her own, too. So, once more, I had to think as fast as I could, for I knew that this time she would be relentless.

" 'No, I shan't smuggle it,' I said, in answer to her look.

" '*You* pay duty—a thousand, two thousand dollars!' she gasped at me, still keeping her eyes on the stone, flashing there in the light. 'Given to you,' she almost hissed, 'by some loving father whose child you guided into the paths of wisdom? Oh, I know you, you lying huzzy! It's mine!' she cried, like a baby crying for the moon, 'it's mine! You—you stole it from me!' "

She paused, at the memory of the scene, and Durkin stirred uneasily on the seat.

"What made the fool say that?" he demanded.

"Why, she meant that she could claim it, and intended to claim it, insinuating that she would see that it was declared at the wharf, if I kept it, and arguing that I might as well lose it quietly to *her*, as to the Treasury officers. I knew in a flash, then, that she didn't know what the Blue Pear was. I closed the little gun-metal case with a snap. Then I put it, Blue Pear and all, in her hand. She turned white, and asked me what I meant.

" 'I am going to give it to you—for a while, at least,' I said, as coolly as I could, making a virtue, of course, of what I knew was going to be a necessity.

"She looked at me open-mouthed. Then she tore open the case, looked at the stone, weighed it in her fingers, gasped a little, held it to the light again, and turned and looked at me still once more.

" 'This pendant *was* stolen!' she cried, with sudden conviction. She looked at the stone again—she couldn't resist it.

" 'You might call it the Robin's Egg, when you have it re-cut,' I told her.

"She gave a jump—that was what she was thinking of, the shrewd old wretch. She shoved the case down in her lean old breast.

" 'Then you will smuggle it in for me?' I asked her.

" 'Yes, I'll get it through, if I have to swallow it!'

" 'And you will keep it?' I asked; and I laughed, I don't know why.

" 'You remember my house?' she cried, with a start.

" 'Like a book!' I told her.

" 'But still I'll keep it!' she declared.

"It was a challenge, a silly challenge, but I felt at that moment that this was indeed a plunge back into the old ways of life. But, to go on. She didn't seem to realize that keeping the Blue Pear was like trying to conceal a white elephant, or attempting to hide away a Sierra Nevada mountain. Then that cruel old avaricious, over-dressed, natural-born criminal had her turn at laughing, a little hysterically, I think. And, for a minute or two, I felt that all the world had gone mad,

that we were only two gray gibbering ghosts talking in the enigmas of insanity, penned up in throbbing cages of white enamelled iron.

"I followed her out of the cabin, and walked up and down alone in the moonlight, wondering if I had done right. At the wharf, I fully intended to risk everything and inform on her, then cable to the Cicelys. But she must have suspected something like that—my stewardess had already told me there were two Treasury Department detectives on board—and got her innings first. For I found myself quietly taken in charge, and my luggage gone over with a microscope —to say nothing of the gentle old lady who massaged me so apologetically from head to foot, and seemed a bit put out to find that I had nothing more dutiable than an extra pair of French gloves."

"Had you expected this beforehand?" interposed Durkin.

"Yes, the stewardess had told me there was trouble impending—that's what made me afraid about the Blue Pear. Just as I got safely through Customs, though, I caught sight of the yellow hag despatching her maid and luggage home in a taxi-cab, while she herself sailed away in another,—I felt so sure she was going straight to her husband's store, Isaac Ottenheimer & Company, the jeweller and diamond man on Fifth Avenue, you know, that I scrambled into a taxi and told the driver to follow my friend to Ottenheimer's. When we pulled up there, I drew the

back curtains down and watched through a quarter-inch crack. The woman came out again, looking very relieved and triumphant. And that's the whole story —only,—"

She did not finish the sentence, but looked at Durkin, who was slowly and dubiously rubbing his hands together, with the old, weary, half-careless look all gone from his studious face.

He glanced back at the woman beside him admiringly, lost himself in thought for a moment, and then laughed outright.

"You're a dare-devil, Frank, if there ever was one!" he cried; then he suddenly grew serious once more.

"No, it's not *daring*," she answered him. "The true name of it is *cowardice!*"

CHAPTER IX

FOUR hours later, in that shabby little oyster-house often spoken of as "The Café of Failures," lying less than a stone's throw from the shabbiest corner of Washington Square, Frances Candler met by appointment a stooped and somewhat sickly-looking workman carrying a small bag of tools. This strange couple sought out a little table in one of the odorous alcoves of the oyster-house, and, over an unexpectedly generous dinner, talked at great length and in low tones, screened from the rest of the room.

"You say it's a Brandon & Stark eight-ton vault; but can't you give me something more definite than that to work on?" the man was asking of the girl.

"Only what I've told you about its position; I had to watch out for Ottenheimer every moment I was in that store."

"I see. But while I think of it, providing we *do* find the stone there, do we turn it over again or—?"

"I gave my word of honor, Jim!"

The shadow of a smile on his face died away before her unyielding solemnity.

"Oh, of course! There's three hundred pounds on it, anyway, isn't there?"

She nodded her head in assent.

"But I think we've got our trouble before us, and plenty of it, before we see that three hundred pounds," he said, with a shrug.

"The time's so short—that is the danger. As I was on the point of telling you, Ottenheimer has an expert diamond-cutter in his shops."

"And that means he'll have the apex off our Pear at the first chance, and, accordingly, it means hurry for us. But tell me the rest."

"Ottenheimer himself owns, I discovered, the double building his store is in. He has his basement, of course, his ground floor show-room and store; and work-rooms, and shipping department, and all that, on the second story. Above them is a lace importer. On the top floor there is a chemical fire-apparatus agency. In the south half of the building, with the hall and stairway between, is an antique furniture store, and above them a surgical supply company. The third and top floors are taken up by two women photographers —their reception room on the third floor, their operating-room, and that sort of thing, on the top floor, with no less than two sky-lights and a transom opening directly on the roof. I arranged for a sitting with them. That is the floor we ought to have, but the building is full. Three doors below, though, there was a top, back studio to let, and I've taken it for a month. There we have a transom opening on the roof. I looked through, merely to see if I could hang my washing out

sometimes. But barring our roof off from Ottenheimer's is an ugly iron fencing."

"Did you get a chance to notice their wiring?"

"The first thing. We can cut in and loop their telephone from our back room, with thirty feet of number twelve wire."

"Then we've got to get in on that line, first thing!"

He ruminated in silence for a minute or two.

"Of course you didn't get a glimpse of the basement, under Ottenheimer's?"

"Hardly, Jim. We shall have to leave that to the gas-man!"

And they both laughed a little over the memory of a certain gas-man who short circuited a private line in the basement of the Stock Exchange building and through doing so upset one of the heaviest cotton brokerage businesses in Wall Street.

"Did you notice any of the other wires—power circuits, and that kind of thing?"

"Yes, I did; but there were too many of them! I know, though, that Ottenheimer's wires go south along our roof."

"Then the sooner we give a quiet ear to that gentleman's conversations, the better for us. Have you had any furniture moved in?"

"It goes this evening. By the way, though, what *am* I just at present?"

Durkin thought for a moment, and then suddenly remembered her incongruous love for needlework.

"You had better be a hard-working maker of cotillion-favors, don't you think? You might have a little show-case put up outside."

She pondered the matter, drumming on the table with her impatient fingers. "But how is all this going to put us inside that eight-ton safe?"

"That's the trouble we've got to face!" he laughed back at her.

"But haven't you thought of anything, candidly?"

"Yes, I have. I've been cudgeling my brains until I feel light-headed. Now, nitro-glycerine I object to, it's so abominably crude, and so disgustingly noisy."

"And so odiously criminal!" she interpolated.

"Precisely. We're not exactly yeggmen yet. And it's brain we've got to cudgel, and not safe-doors! I mean, now that we really are mixed up in this sort of thing, it's better to do it with as clean fingers as possible. Now, once more, speaking as an expert, by lighting a small piece of sulphur, and using it as a sort of match to start and maintain combustion, I could turn on a stream of liquid oxygen and burn through that safe-steel about the same as a carpenter bores through a pine board. But the trouble is in getting the oxygen. Then, again, if it was a mere campaign of armour against the intruder, I could win out in quite a different way. I could take powdered aluminum, mixed with some metallic superoxide, such as iron-rust, and get what you'd call thermit. Then I could take this thermit, and ignite it by means of a

magnesium wire, so that it would burn down through three inches of steel like a handful of live coals through three inches of ice. That is, if we wanted to be scientific and up-to-date. Or, even a couple of gallons of liquid air, say, poured on the top of the safe, ought to chill the steel so that one good blow from a sledge would crack it."

"But that, again, is only what cracksmen do, in a slightly different way!"

"But, of course, by tapping an exceptionally strong power-circuit somewhere in the neighborhood, I could fuse portions of the steel with electricity, and then cut it away like putty. Yet all that, you see, is not only mechanical and coarse, and full of drawbacks, but it's doing what we don't want to do. It's absolutely ruining a valuable deposit-vault, and might very well be interpreted as and called a criminal destruction of property. We have no moral and legal right to smash this gentleman's safe. But in that safe lies a stone to which he has neither moral nor legal right, and it's the stone, and only the stone, that we want."

"Then what are we to do?"

"Use these thick heads of ours, as we ought. We must *think,* and not *pound* our way into that vault. I mean, Frank, that we have got to get at that stone as Ottenheimer himself would!"

They looked at each other for a minute of unbroken silence, the one trying to follow the other's wider line of thought.

"Well, there is where our test comes in, I suppose," said Frances, valiantly, feeling for the first time a little qualm of doubt.

Durkin, who had been plunged in thought, turned to her with a sudden change of manner.

"You're a bad lot, Frank!" he said, warmly, catching her frail-looking hands in his own.

"I know it," she answered, wistfully, leaning passively on her elbows. "But some day I am going to change—we're both going to change!" And she stroked his studiously bent head with her hand, in a miserably solicitous, maternal sort of way, and sighed heavily once or twice, trying in vain to console herself with the question as to why a good game should be spoilt by a doubtful philosophy.

CHAPTER X

ENTRENCHED in her little top-floor studio, behind a show-case of cotillion-favors, Miss Cecelia Starr sat in her wicker rocker, very quietly and very contentedly sewing. She felt that it had been an exceptionably profitable day for her.

Three hairpins and a linen handkerchief held a watch-case receiver close over her ear, after the style of the metallic ear-bands of a central-office operator. Leading from this improvised ear-band and trailing across the floor out into her private room at the back, ran a green cloth-covered wire. This wire connected again with an innocent-looking and ordinary desk-battery transmitter, rigged up with a lever switch, and standing on a little table next to the wall, up which might be detected the two bimetallic wires which, since ten o'clock that morning, tapped and bridged the general wire connecting the offices of Ottenheimer & Company with the outside world.

From time to time the members of that firm went to their telephone, little dreaming that a young lady, decorously sewing velvet scissors-cases on a studio top-floor of another building, was quietly listening to every message that passed in and out of their bustling

place of business. It was a strange medley of talk, some of it incoherent, some of it dull, some of it amusing. Sometimes the busy needle was held poised, and a more interested and startled expression flitted over the shadowy violet eyes of Miss Cecelia Starr. At such times she vaguely felt that she was a disembodied spirit, listening to the hum of a far-away world, or, at other times, that she was an old astrologer, gazing into some mystic and forbidden crystal. Still again, as she listened, she felt like a veritable eagle, invisible, poised high in ethereal emptiness, watching hungrily a dim and far-off sign of earthly life and movement.

Suddenly, from the street door sounded the familiar two-three ring of Durkin. This door remained open during the day, and she waited for him to come up. She went to her own door, however, and laughed girlishly as he stepped into the room, mopping his moist forehead. There was a very alert, nervous, triumphant expression in his eyes, and once again the feeling swept over her that it was now crime, and crime alone, that could stimulate into interest and still satisfy their fagged vitalities. It was their one and only intoxication, the one thing that could awaken them from their mental sloth and stir them from life's shadowy valley of disillusionment.

Her quick eye had taken note of the fact that he wore a soiled blue uniform, and the leather-peaked blue cap of a Consolidated Gas Company employee, and

that he carried with him a brass hand-pump. He laughed a little to himself, put down his pump in one corner of the room, and allowed his fingers to stray through his mutilated Vandyke, now a short and straggly growth of sandy whiskers. Then he turned to her with an unuttered query on his face.

"I was right," she said quietly, but hurriedly.

"I never really doubted it!"

"Ottenheimer has a private drawer in the vault. It's in that. His wife telephoned down very cautiously about it this morning. A little later, too, Ottenheimer was called up from a Brooklyn drugstore, by a Mrs. Van Gottschalk, or some such name, who said her husband was still in bed with the grip, and couldn't possibly get over until Monday. This man, you see, is Ottenheimer's diamond-cutter."

"Thank heaven, that gives us a little more time!"

"Three days, at least! But what have you done, Jim?"

"Been trying to persuade the janitor of the Ottenheimer Building that I was sent to pump the water out of his gas-pipes,—but he was just as sure that I wasn't. I got down in his cellar, though, and had a good look about, before I saw it wouldn't do to push the thing too far. So I insisted on going up and seeing the owner about that order. There was an inside stairway, and a queer-looking steel door I wanted to get my knuckles against. I started up there, but he hauled me back. I found out, though, that this door is made

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of one-inch steel armor-plate. There's another door leading from the foot of the outer hallway into the cellar itself. But that's only covered with soft sheet-iron —more against fire than anything else. Fifteen minutes will get through that one, easily. It's the inner door that is the problem. I tried it with a knife-point, just one hard little jab. It took the end off my Roger's blade."

"But is this door the only way in?"

"Absolutely; the rear is impossible, bricked-up; and the Avenue itself is a little too conspicuous. The bolts of this door, as far as I can make out, slide into heavy steel cups sunk in solid cement, and are controlled, of course, from inside. Judging from the thickness of these, and the sound of the door, it would take either a pound of soap and nitro-glycerine on the one hand, or five hours of hard drilling with diamond-point drills, on the other, to get through. We'll say seven hours, altogether, to get into the building. Then comes the safe, or, rather, the vault itself. I had a casual glance at that safe this morning, before I got these duds on —dropped in to purchase an engagement ring, but was altogether too hard to suit. It's a ten-tonner, I believe, and about as burglar-proof as it can be made. Nothing but a gallon of gun-cotton would make so much as a dent in it. But here again, explosions are not in my line. We've got to use these wits of ours. We've got to get in that safe, and we've got to get through that door! I can't risk six hours of machine-

shop work down there; and I'm still too respectable to drop into safe-cracking."

"Well, the combinations of that sort of vault, you know, aren't often advertised on the ash-barrels."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean we have got to get it by our own wits, as you say."

"The janitor, old Campbell, leaves the building about ten-fifteen every night. He's also a sort of day-watchman, I find. He's a pretty intelligent and trusty old fellow, absolutely unapproachable from our standpoint. Another thing, too, the place is webbed with Holmes' burglar-alarm apparatus. It would take another hour or so to get the right wires cut off and bridged. I hate to feel squeamish at this stage of the game—but that Ottenheimer safe does look uninviting!"

Frances walked up and down, with the little watch-case receiver and its handkerchief still crowning her heavy mass of dark hair, like a coronet, and the green wires trailing behind her, like the outline of a bridal-veil. She was thinking quickly and desperately. Suddenly she stopped in the midst of her pacing, and looked hard at Durkin.

"I've found it," she said, in a feverish half-whisper. "We've got to do it!"

Durkin looked at her gloomily, still struggling with his own line of fruitless thought.

"Here, Jim, quick, take this and listen!" She placed the receiver close to his ear as she spoke.

"Now, that's Ottenheimer himself at the 'phone. Can you catch his voice distinctly? Well, do you notice what kind of voice it is—its timbre, I mean? A plaintive-toned, guttural, suave, mean, cringing sort of voice! Listen hard. He may not be at the 'phone again today. Is he still talking?"

"Yes, the old scoundrel. There, he's finished!"

"What was it about?"

"Just kicking to some one down in Maiden Lane, because Judge Hazel, of the District Court, has overruled the board of appraisers and imposed a ten per cent. *ad valorem* duty on natural pearls coming in."

"But his voice—Jim, you have got to learn to imitate that voice."

"And then what?"

"Then cut in, presumably from Ottenheimer's own house, and casually ask, say, Phipps, the second salesman, and head of the shipping department, just what your safe-combination happens to be. It has slipped your memory, you see?"

"And Phipps, naturally, in such a case, will ring up Central and verify the call."

"Not necessarily. At the first call from him we shall cut his wire!"

"Which cuts us off, and gives us away, as soon as a special messenger can deliver a message and a lineman trace up the trouble."

"Then why cut him off at all? If that's too risky, should the worst come to the worst, we can tell Cen-

tral it's a case of crossed wires, bewilder her a bit, and then shut ourselves off."

"I believe you've almost got it."

"But can you get anywhere near that voice?"

"Listen, Frank; how's this?"

He drew in his chin, half-laughingly, and throwing his voice into a whining yet businesslike guttural, spoke through an imaginary transmitter to an imaginary Phipps.

"That would never, never do!" cried the other, despairingly. "He's a German Jew, if you have noticed —he sounds his w's like w's, and not like v's, but he makes his *r*'s like w's."

"Oh, I have it," broke in Durkin, from a silent contemplation of his desk-'phone. "We'll just release the binding-posts on our transmitter a little, and, let's say, keep the electrode-bearing a trifle slack—fix things up, I mean, so that any voice will sound as tinny as a phonograph—decompose it, so to speak. Then, if necessary, we can lay it to the fact that the wires are out of order somewhere!"

"Good, but when—when can we do it?"

Durkin paced the room with his old-time, restless, animal-like stride, while Frances readjusted her receiver and restlessly took her seat in the wicker rocker once more.

"This is Friday. That leaves Saturday night the only possible night for the—er—invasion. Then, you see, we get a whole day for a margin. First, we've

got to find out exactly what time Ottenheimer himself leaves the place, and whether it's Phipps, or some one else, who closes up, and just what time he does it."

"They close at half-past five on Saturdays. Ottenheimer has already made an engagement for tomorrow, about five at the Astor, with an importer, to doctor up some invoice or other."

"We could make that do; though, of course, any one in his office would be more likely to suspect a call from the Astor, being a public place. You must find out, definitely, this afternoon, just who it is closes up tomorrow. Then we must get hold of some little business detail or two, to fling in at him in case he has any suspicions."

"That shouldn't be so very difficult. Though I do wish you could get something nearer Ottenheimer's voice!"

"I'll have a rehearsal or two alone—though, I guess, we can muffle up that 'phone to suit our purpose. My last trouble now, is to find out how I'm going to get through those two doors without powder."

Again he fell to pacing the little room with his abstracted stride, silently testing contingency after contingency, examining and rejecting the full gamut of possibilities. Sometimes he stood before the woman with the receiver, staring at her with vacant and unseeing eyes; at other times he paced between her and the window. Then he paused before the little green

coils of wire that stretched across the room. He studied them with involuntary and childish movements of the head and hands. Then he suddenly stood erect, ran to the back window, and flung it open.

"My God, I've got it!" he cried, running back to where the woman still sat, listening, "I've got it!"

"How?" she asked, catching her breath.

"I've got to eat my way through what may be, for all I know, a full inch of Harveyized steel. I've got to burrow and work through it in some way, haven't I? It has to be done quickly, too. I've got to have power, strong power."

He stopped, suddenly, and seemed to be working out the unmastered details in his own mind, his eyes bent on a little shelf in one corner of the room.

"Have you ever seen an electric fan? You see this shelf, up here in the corner! Well, at one time, an electric fan stood there—see, here are the remnants of the wires. It stood there whirling away at five or six thousand revolutions to the minute, and with no more power than it takes to keep an ordinary office-lamp alight. Right at the back of this house is a wire, a power-circuit, alive with more than two hundred times that voltage, with power in plenty—a little condensed Niagara of power—asking to be taken off and made use of!"

"But what use?"

"I can capture and tame and control that power, Frank. I can make it my slave, and carry it along

with me, almost in my pocket, on a mere thread of copper. I can make it a living, iron-eating otter, with a dozen fangs—in the shape of quarter-inch drills, gnawing and biting and eating through that armor-plate door about the same as a rat would gnaw through a wooden lath. Oh, we've got them, Frank! We've got them this time!"

"Not until we know that combination, though," qualified the colder-thoughted woman in the wicker rocker, still not quite understanding how or in what the other had found so potent and so unexpected an ally. And while he leaned out of the window, studying the wire-distribution, she discreetly slipped her watch-case receiver over her head, in case anything of importance should be going through over the telephone.

CHAPTER XI

IN THE paling afternoon, with a pearl-mist of fine rain thinly shrouding the city, Frances Candler waited for Durkin impatiently, with her watch open before her. As the frail steel hand, implacable as fate, sank away toward the half-hour mark, her own spirits sank with it. It was not often Durkin was late. Another ten minutes would make him forever too late. She debated within herself whether or not she should risk her own voice over the wire to Ottenheimer's office, while there was yet time, or wait it out to the last. Then she remembered, to her sudden horror, that the transmitter still stood in its perfectly-adjusted and normal condition, that there could be no muffling, incompetent mechanism to disguise the tones of her voice.

She was still beating despairingly through a tangle of dubious possibilities when the reassuring two-three ring of the door-bell sounded out, through the quiet of the lonely twilight, with startling clearness. A minute later Durkin came panting into the room. He was clean-shaven, immaculate, and most painfully out-of-breath.

"Is there time?" he gasped, putting down a heavy suit-case and peeling off his coat as he spoke.

"It's twenty-one minutes after five. If Phipps is punctual, that gives you only four minutes."

By this time Durkin had the suit-case open. In another half-minute he had the casing off the transmitter. Then a deft turn or two with his screw-driver, a tentative touch or two on the electrode, and in another half minute the casing was restored, and he was gently tapping on the diaphragm of the transmitter, with the receiver at his ear, testing the sound.

"Just a minute, now, till I cool down, and get my breath! I had endless trouble getting my drill apparatus—at one time I thought I'd have to take a dentist's tooth-driller, or some such thing. But I got what I wanted—that's what kept me. Anything new?"

He turned with the receiver still at his ear, and for the first time looked at her closely. Her face seemed pale, and a little weary-looking, against her black street-gown; the shadowy wistfulness about her eyes seemed more marked than ever.

"Yes," she was laughing back at him, however, "something most prodigious has happened. I have an order for one dozen cotillion-favors, to be done in velvet and crimson satin, and delivered next Saturday afternoon!"

Durkin himself laughed shortly, and faced the telephone once more, asking her how time was.

"You haven't a second to lose!"

His own face was a little paler than usual as he

stood before the transmitter, while Frances, with her watch in her hand, went on saying that, if Phipps was punctual, he would be out and away in one minute's time.

Durkin took a last look around, said under his breath, "Well, here goes!" and placed the receiver to his ear.

For a moment the woman, watching him, with half-parted lips, was haunted by the sudden impression that she had lived through the scene before, that each move and sound were in some way second-hand to her inner consciousness, older than time itself, a blurred and dateless photograph on the plates of memory.

"Hello! Hello! Is that you, Phipps?" she heard him say, and his voice sounded thin and far-away. There was a pause—it seemed an endless pause—and he repeated the query, louder.

"This is Ottenheimer. Yes, something wrong with the 'phone. Don't cable Teetzel—I say don't cable Teetzel, about those canary diamonds, until you see me. Yes, Teetzel. Did you get that? Well,—er—what the devil's our safe combination? Yes, yes, Ottenheimer!"

"Slower—slower, Jim!" groaned the girl, behind him.

"Combination's slipped my mind, Phipps. Yes; after dinner; want to run down and look over the books. Louder, please; I can't hear. Yes, that's better. To the right three times, to seventy-four—back

thirty—on eighty-two—back one hundred and eight—and on seven. Yes. It's the second last figure slipped me. Better close up now. Better close up, I say. All right,—good-bye!"

The last minute vibration ebbed out of the transmitter's tingling diaphragm; but still neither the listening man nor woman moved. They waited, tense, expectant, tossed between doubt and hope, knowing only too well that the questioning tinkle of a little polished, nickel bell would sound the signal of their absolute and irreparable defeat.

Second by second, a minute dragged itself away. Then another, and another, and still no call came from Ottenheimer's office, for Central. The woman moved a little restlessly. The man sighed deeply. Then he slowly put down the receiver, and mopped his moist face and forehead.

"I think he's safe," half-whispered Durkin, with his eyes still on the transmitter.

"He may suspect any moment though—when he's had time to think it over, especially."

"I rather doubt it. Our voices were nothing but broken squeaks. But if he does ring up Central, we'll have to risk it and jump in and claim a wire's crossed somewhere."

Then he repeated the strange formula: "To the right three times, to seventy-four—back thirty—on eighty-two—back one hundred and eight—and on seven. Can you get it down, Frank?"

She nodded, as she wrote it in pencil, on a slip of paper. This he placed in his waistcoat pocket, and mopped his face once more, laughing—perhaps a little hysterically, as he watched the 'phone and felt the passing minutes drip relievingly, like the softest of balm, on his strained nerves.

"And now what?" asked Frances, sharing his relief, as he went to the window, and breathed the fresh air that blew in through the low-ceilinged little studio.

"Now," said Durkin, jubilantly, "now we begin our real work!" He opened his suit-case and handed her a heavy, cylindrical, steel implement. Into one end of this odd-looking tool he slipped and clamped a slender, polished little shaft of grooved steel.

"That's what nearly lost me everything," he continued, carefully unpacking, as he spoke, a condenser, a tangent galvanometer, a pair of lineman's-gloves, a Warner pocket battery-gauge, a pair of electrician's scissors and pliers, two or three coils of wire, a half-a-dozen pony glass insulators, and a handful or two of smaller tools.

"Here, you see, is what I set up business with," he soliloquized, as he studied the litter they made on the floor. He looked up quickly, as she drew her little table out from the wall and lifted the transmitter up on the empty electric-fan shelf. "Er—before I forget it," he said, absently, his eyes still on his widely strewn apparatus, "have you got everything you want away from here?"

She had; though she hated to leave her show-case, she said. Some day she might like to take up fancy sewing again. "But before we do another thing," she insisted, "we ought to have dinner. Breakfast, this morning, was our last meal, I know!"

And to his utter astonishment, Durkin remembered that he was famished.

It was a hurried and humble little meal they ate together in the failing light,—a meal of sandwiches washed down with bottled milk. Their thoughts as they ate, however, were on other things, grappling with impending problems, wondering when and under what circumstances their next meal would be eaten, almost glorying in the very uncertainty of their future, tingling with the consciousness of the trial they were to undergo, of the hazard they essayed. Then Durkin, as he smoked, laid out his final plan of action, point by premeditated point.

CHAPTER XII

AT twenty minutes to eleven, slipping off his shoes, Durkin climbed cautiously through the transom opening out on the roof. Creeping as carefully from chimney tier to chimney tier, he found himself face to face with a roof-fence of sharpened iron rods. He counted down this fence to the eighteenth rod, then carefully lifted on it. The lead that sealed it in the lower cross-piece, and into the stone beneath that again, had been strangely fused away, and the loosened rod slid up through the top horizontal bar very much like a miniature portcullis. Squeezing through this narrow opening, he carefully replaced the rod behind him. With a flattened piece of steel, once used for a furnace poker, and looking very much like a gigantic tack-drawer, he slowly and gently forced the bolt that held shut the transom on the Ottenheimer building. This he replaced, after passing through, paying out with him as he went, two coils of rubber-coated wire, in appearance not unlike a large size of incandescent lamp cord.

From the photographer's studio in which he found himself, nothing but a draw-bolt kept him from an outside hallway. Making sure that the building was

deserted, and everything safe, he worked his way slowly down, like a diver, stair by stair, to the basement. Here he made a careful study of the little tunnel of electric wires at the back of the lower hall, probing, testing, measuring, and finally, with cool deliberation, "bridging" the necessary portion of the burglar-alarm connection, which he knew to be operated on a closed circuit. This circuit he diverted as a miner diverts a troublesome stream. Then, holding before him his little two-candle incandescent lamp, scarcely bigger than his thumb nail, he groped toward the iron covered door that divided one-half of the building from the other.

Here he directed his thin shaft of light into the crack between the heavy door and its studding, and his squinting eyes made out the iron lock-bar that held him out. From his vest pocket, where they stood in a row like glimmering pencils, he took out one of the slim steel drills, adjusted it noiselessly in the drill-flange, and snapped shut his switch. There was the quick spit of a blue spark, and of a sudden, the inanimate thing of steel throbbed and sang and quivered with mysterious life. As he glanced down at it, in its fierce revolutions, he realized that once more he had for an accomplice that old-time silent, and ever-ready assistant which for years had been a well-tested and faithful friend. The mere companionship with so familiar a force brought back to him his waning confidence.

He forced the whirling drill through the door-crack and in against the bar. It ate through the soft iron as though it had been a bar of cheese. Eight carefully placed perforations, side by side, had severed the end of the lockshaft. He shut off the current, confidently, and swung open the heavy door. The falling piece of iron made a little tinkle of sound on the cement flooring, then all was silence again. He had at least, he told himself, captured the enemy's outposts.

Cautiously he felt his way across the warm cellar, up the steps, and at last faced his one definite barrier, the door of solid steel, abutted by even more solid masonry. The builders of that door had done their best to make it forbidding to men of his turn of mind, Durkin ruminated, as he felt and sounded and tested despondently over its taciturn painted surface.

He studied the hinges carefully, through his tiny lamp. They were impregnable. As he had surmised, his only way was to cut out, inch by inch, the three heavy steel shafts, or bolt-bars, which slipped and fitted into steel casings also, apparently, embedded in solid masonry.

Adjusting his drill, he closed the switch once more, and, bracing the instrument's head against his breastbone, watched the slender, humming, spinning shaft bite and grind and burrow its way into the slowly yielding bar. From a little pocket-can, every minute or two, he squirted kerosene in on the drill-tip. The pungent smell of the scorching oil, as it spread on the

heated steel, rose almost suffocatingly to his nostrils in the furnace-heated warmth of the cellar and for weeks afterwards remained an indistinct and odious memory to him.

When his first hole was bored, and his little drill raced wildly through into space, like the screw of a liner on the crest of a wave, he started a second, close beside the first; then a third, and a fourth, and a fifth, slowly honeycombing the thick steel with his minute excavations. Sometimes a drill would snap off short, and he would have to draw a fresh one from his stock. Sometimes it did not bite sharply, and he tried another. And still he stood drilling, directing the power of his silent, insidious, untiring accomplice, whose spirit crooned and burned and sighed itself out through the wire at his feet.

As he worked, he lost all track of time; after he had started what he knew to be the last hole, he stopped and looked at his watch, as casually as he had done often enough after a night of operating the key in a despatcher's office. To his horror, he saw that it had stopped, stunned with a natural enough electrolytic paralysis. It might not yet be twelve, or it might be four in the morning; time, from the moment he had taken off his shoes in Frances Candler's little back room, had been annihilated to him. He wondered, in sudden alarm, if she were still maintaining her patrol outside, up and down the block. He wondered, too, as he drove the little drill home for the last time, and

cautiously pried open the great, heavy door, if she had sent any signal in from the street front, and he had missed it. He even wondered, quakingly, if daylight would not overtake them at their work—when his startled eyes, chancing to fall on a nearby clock-dial, saw that the hour was only twenty-five minutes to twelve.

Step by step he crept back to the inner offices, followed by the murmurous ticking of a dozen noisy clocks, declaiming his presence. From the door in front of where the safe stood, gloomy, ominous, impregnable-looking, he lifted a seemingly innocent rubber mat. As he thought, it had been attached to a burglar-alarm apparatus. Dropping on one knee, he repeated his formula, number by number, each time listening for the telltale click of the falling ward. Then, turning the nickel lock-knob, he heard the many-barred lock chuck back into place.

The next moment the ponderous doors were open, and Durkin's little thumb-nail electric lamp was exploring the tiers of inner compartments.

He still carried his drill with him; and, once he had found the private drawer he wanted, the softer iron of the inner fittings offered little resistance to a brutally impatient one-eighth bit. After two minutes of feverish work, he was able to insert the point of his furnace poker into the drawer, and firmly but gently pry it open.

The next moment his blackened and oily fingers

were rummaging carelessly through a fortune or two of unset stones—through little trays of different tinted diamonds, through crowded little cases of Ceylon pearls and Uralian emeralds. At last, in a smaller compartment, marked "I. Ottenheimer," he found a gun-metal case sealed up in an envelope. The case itself, however, was securely locked. Durkin hesitated for one half second; then he forced the lid open with his steel screw-driver.

One look was enough. It held the Blue Pear.

He stooped and carefully brushed up the steel cuttings under his shoeless feet. As carefully he closed the inner drawers of the safe. His hand was on the nickel lock-knob once more, to swing the ponderous outer doors shut, when a sound fell on his ears, a sound that made his very blood chill and tingle and chill again through all his tense body.

It was Frank's voice, outside the same building in which he stood, not a hundred feet away from him, her voice shrilly screaming for help.

His first mad impulse was to rush out to her, blindly. A second precautionary flash of thought kept him rooted to the spot, where he stood listening. He could hear confused, sharp voices, and the scuffling of feet. He heard the quick scream again; then guttural, angry protests. Some subliminal prompting told Durkin that that scream was not one of terror, but of warning.

Snapping out his incandescent lamp, he stole cau-

tiously forward through the row of partitioned, heavily-carpeted little offices, and, without showing himself, peered toward the shop-front. As he did so, a second involuntary thrill of apprehension sped up and down his backbone. The street-door itself was open. Already half way in through that door was a dark, stoutly-built man. He stood struggling in the arms of a determined young woman. That woman, Durkin could see, was Frances Candler. And all the while that she was clinging to him and holding him she was crying lustily for help.

The next moment Durkin made out the man. It was Ottenheimer, himself. For some unknown reason, he hastily surmised, the diamond merchant had intended to drop into his own office. But why, he still asked, was Frank taking such risks?

Durkin did not try to work the thing out in its minute details. Like a flash, he darted back to the open safe. He swung the big doors to, locked them, caught up his drill, and the loose strands of wire, and then backed quickly out through the steel door, securing it with a deft twist or two of a piece of his number twelve. The outer cellar door he as quickly closed after him.

Then he flew upstairs, two steps at a time, rebolted the photographers' hall door, replaced the transom as he swung up through it, and as hurriedly refitted the loose iron bar in the roof-fencing.

Three minutes later, a well-dressed gentleman, wear-

ing a black hat and carrying a large leather suit-case, stopped, with a not unnatural curiosity, on his way up Fifth Avenue, to inquire the meaning of an excited little crowd that clustered about two policemen and a woman in the doorway of Ottenheimer & Company.

He drew up, casually enough, and listened while a short, stout, and very indignant man spluttered and gesticulated and angrily demanded how any one should dare to stop him from going into his own store. He was the owner of the place—there was his own watchman to identify him,—and somebody would be "broke" for this tomfoolery, he declared, with a shake of the fist toward the silent sergeant beside him.

The young woman, who chanced to be veiled, explained in her well-modulated, rich contralto voice that the hour had seemed so unusual, the store had looked so dark inside, even the burglar-alarm, she stubbornly insisted, had rung so loudly, that, naturally, it had made her suspicious. She was sorry if it was a mistake, But now the officers were there; they could attend to it—if some one would kindly call a taxi for her.

The sergeant between her and Ottenheimer agreed with her, and stepping out and stopping an empty motor-cab on its way up the Avenue, turned back to the still enraged owner of the store and solicitously advised him to go home and cool down.

"You hold that woman!" demanded Ottenheimer, husky with rage. "You hold that woman, until I examine these premises!"

The young woman, obviously, and also quite naturally, objected to being held. There was a moment of puzzled silence, and then a murmur of disapproval from the crowd, for about the carefully gloved girl in the black street-gown and plumed hat clung that nameless touch of birth and bearing which marked her as a person who would be more at home in a limousine than in a wind-swept doorway.

"The lady, of course, will wait!" quietly but deliberately suggested the black-hatted man with the suitcase, looking casually in over the circling crowd of heads.

The sergeant turned, sharply, glaring out his sudden irritability.

"Now, who asked you to butt in on this?" he demanded, as he impatiently elbowed the pressing crowd further out into a wider circle.

"I merely suggested that the lady wait," repeated the man in the black hat, as unperturbed as before.

"Of course, officer, I shall wait, willingly," said the girl, hurriedly, in her equally confident, low-noted rich contralto. She drew her skirts about her, femininely, merely asking that the shop-owner might make his search as quickly as possible.

Ottenheimer and the doubtful-minded sergeant disappeared into the gloom of the midnight store. As the whole floor flowered into sudden electric luminousness, Durkin thanked his stars that he had had sense enough to leave the lighting wires intact.

"Everything's all right; you may go, miss," said the sergeant, two minutes later. "I guess old Isaac's had an early nightmare!" And the dispersing crowd laughed sympathetically.

The woman stepped into the motor-cab, and turned toward Broadway.

Safely round the corner, she picked up the waiting Durkin.

"That was a close one—but we win!" he murmured jubilantly.

"You've got it?"

"I've got it," he exulted.

The woman at his side, for some vague reason, could not share in his joy. Intuitively, in that moment of exhaustion, she felt that their triumph, at the most, was a mere conspiracy of indifference on the part of a timeless and relentless destiny. And in the darkness of the carriage she put her ineffectual arms about Durkin, passionately, as though such momentary guardianship might shield him for all time to come.

She shook her abstractedness from her, with a long and fluttering sigh.

"Jim," she asked him, unexpectedly, "how much money have you?"

He told her, as nearly as he could. "It's hanged little, you see!" he added, not understanding the new anxiety that was eating at her heart,—"but I've been thinking of a plan!"

"Oh, what now?" she asked miserably, out of her weariness.

She knew, well enough, the necessity of keeping up, of maintaining both activity and appearances. She knew that wrong-doing such as theirs, when without even its mockery of respectability and its ironical touch of dignity, was loathsome to both the eye and the soul. But she found that there were moods and times, occurring now more and more frequently, when she dreaded each return to that subterranean and fear-haunted world. She dreaded it now, not so much for herself, as for Durkin; and as he briefly told her of his plan, this feeling grew stronger within her.

"Then if it must be done," she cried, "let *me* do the worst part of it!"

He looked at her, puzzled, not comprehending the source of her passionate cry, blindly wondering if her over-adventurous life was not getting a deeper and deeper hold on her. But her next question put him to shame.

"Jim, if I help you in this, if I do all that has to be done, will you promise me that you will make it bring you closer to your work on your amplifier, and your transmitting camera? Can't you promise to get back to that decent work once more?"

"I'll promise, if you'll make me one promise in return," said Durkin, after a moment of silent thought.

"What is it?" she asked.

"Will you let me hold over this Singford stone, for a few weeks?"

"But why?" she asked, aghast.

"To oil the curtain that has to go up on our next act!" he answered, grimly. "I mean a few hundred, now, would make things so simple again."

"No," she protested fiercely, "it must not, it shall not, be done. The Blue Pear must go back to London tomorrow!"

"It will mean some hard work for us both, then."

"I can't help that, Jim. We'll have to face it together. But this stone is a thing we can't trifle with, or equivocate over. I should hate myself, I should even hate *you,* if I thought it wasn't to go back to London, by express, tomorrow morning!"

"Then back it goes!" said the man at her side. He could see, even in the dim light of the taxi, the rebellious and wounded look that had crept into her face.

"Whatever it brought me, I couldn't endure your hate!" he said, taking her hand in his.

CHAPTER XIII

AS a result of her midnight conference with Durkin, Frances Candler learned many things. One of these was the fact that the life into which she had flung herself was proving a captor that already threatened to extort a cruelly impossible ransom. Another was the discovery that Durkin stood even deeper than she did in those conspiratorial quicksands from which she tore one limb only to be engulfed by another. For all along, she saw, he had been a quiet observant *intrigant,* conspiring against a new field of activity toward which she had not even thought to glance.

For after that hurried midnight talk she knew that the Secretary of Agriculture, at Washington, from time to time received sealed mail reports from the South as to the condition of the cotton crop. She also learned that there had been a series of startling and disastrous "leaks" from these confidential government reports, and that a private wire now connected the office of the Department with Savannah and New Orleans. Durkin had already ascertained that over this wire, on the last day, or the last "market" day, of each month, until the leakage had been stopped, would pass those despatches and figures on which the

Department of Agriculture would verify and base its monthly report of the cotton outlook.

"That system is going to be kept up," Durkin had explained to her, "until the Secretary finds out who is stealing the figures and doing the manipulating on them in the New York Cotton Exchange. At any rate, I know he's going to keep this wire in use until the decent brokers stop bombarding him and the Census Bureau with their telegrams about collusion and fraud. But here's the point that interests us. If this present wire report turns out to be favorable, the feverish way the market stands now, it means, of course that there's going to be a pretty serious break in Cotton Exchange trading. But, on the other hand, if this short-cut official report carries the news of a shortage, it's as plain as day that Curry and all the other New York bears will have a lever to pry up the price of cotton with, high as it stands already."

"And what is it we want to know?" she had asked.

"We've got to find out which way that report goes —whether it's good or bad. I'll be here in New York, waiting to get your cipher message over a Postal-Union wire. Whichever way it goes, I'll govern myself accordingly, jump into the market with every penny I have, and do precisely what three hundred highly respectable brokers have been doing for the last two months. The only thing that makes me hot is that I haven't a few thousand, instead of a paltry few hundred, to fling into it!"

Her instructions were brief, but explicit. While he waited in New York, ready to act on word from her, she was to hurry to Washington, and from Washington go on to the somnolent little Virginia town of Leeksville. This town, Durkin had already made sure, lay on the route of the Department of Agriculture's New Orleans wire.

On the main street of the little town through which this wire ran stood a ramshackle, three-storied wooden hotel. From the top floor of this hotel every wire that went humming like a harp of haste through that avenue of quietness was easily accessible. Any person enlightened and audacious enough to pick it out from among its companions and attach to it a few feet of "No. 12" and a properly graduated relay would find the rest of his task astoundingly easy. As Durkin had pointed out, already knowing what they did, the one great problem lay in getting unsuspected into the third-floor room of that wooden Leeksville hotel.

With a jointed split-bamboo fishing-pole, neatly done up in a parasol cover, and with her complete wire-tapping outfit as neatly packed away in a dress-suit case, Frances Candler ten hours later registered at that ancient and unsavory-looking hostelry. A weary and bedraggled theatrical company, which had just made the late "jump" from Fredericksburg, preceded her, and she made it a point to approach the desk at the heels of a half-a-dozen noisy chorus girls.

There she asked for a top-floor room.

The over-gallant clerk insisted that she should go anywhere but on the top floor. There would be no difference in the cost of the rooms, to her. He would make that, indeed, a personal matter.

"But I prefer the top floor," she maintained, biting her lip and giving no other sign of her indignation.

The clerk insisted that the climb would be too much for her; and most of the floor, he explained, was given over to the servants.

She began to despair.

"But I sleep lightly—and I *must* have seclusion!"

The perturbed clerk protested that in Leeksville noises were unknown by day, much less by night. A circle of rotunda idlers now stood behind her, taking in the scene. A flash of inspiration came to her.

"I've *got* to go up to the top, I tell you!" she cried, impatiently. "Can't you see I've got asthma!"

And the angry asthmatic woman in the heavy veil was finally surrendered to the loneliness and discomfort of her southwest corner room on the barren and carpetless third floor.

There she quietly unpacked her suit-case, jointed her pole of split bamboo, attached and graduated her relay, and fingered noiselessly through the tangle of wires beneath her window for that one and essential thread of metal along which was to flash the departmental cotton reports, between New Orleans and Washington.

There, hour after hour, she sat and waited and watched; and it was late in the next morning that, white and worn-out, she detached the unobserved wire, hurried off her brief despatch in cipher, ordered breakfast up to her room, and even before undressing fell into a long and restless slumber.

That day, in her narrow little corn-husk bed, she dreamed that she and Durkin had tunnelled under the Potomac River and had carried away the last ounce of gold from the United States Treasury. How many millions they had taken it was beyond them even to count. But she knew they were escaping in submarines and were being breathlessly pursued by the entire North Atlantic fleet. And her one great fear, during all that agonized and endless pursuit, seemed not that she was destined either to final capture, or to final suffocation, but that, in some way, she might become separated from Durkin.

CHAPTER XIV

DURKIN waited, with the receiver at his ear. Once more the signal-bell shrilled and cluttered its curtly hurried warning. A vague yet nasal and half-impatient voice murmured brokenly out of somewhere to some one: "You're connected now—go ahead."

Then came a grating rasp and drone, a metallic click or two, and out of the stillness there floated in to his waiting ear the space-filtered music of an anxious "Hello"—flute-like, mellow, far-away.

It seemed to him there, under the stress of his passing mood, that an incorporeal presence had whispered the word to him. Suddenly, for the first time in his life, the miracle of it all came home to him, the mystery and magic of that tenuous instrument, which could guide, and treasure, and carry in to him through the night the very tone and timbre of that one familiar voice, flashing it so many miles through star-hung forest and hill and valley, threading it on through sleeping towns and turbulent cities, winging it through wind and water unerringly home to his waiting ear.

"Hello!" the anxious contralto was asking again.

"Hello?" cried Durkin, pent in the little bald speak-

ing-closet, yet his face illuminated with a wonderful new alertness. "Hello! Is that you, Frank?"

A ripple of relieved laughter ebbed out of the wire.

"Oh, Jim," sounded the far-away voice in his ear, sighingly. "It seems so good!"

"Where are you?"

"In Washington, at the Arlington office."

He chuckled a little, as though the accomplishment of the miracle, the annihilation of so many miles of space, was a matter of his own personal triumph.

"Here we're talking together through three hundred miles of midnight!" he boasted to her.

"Yes, I know; but I wish it wasn't so far! Did you recognize my voice there?"

"I'd know that voice in—in Hell!" he answered, with a sudden grim but inadequate earnestness. He had hoped to say something fitting and fine, but, as always seemed to happen to him in such moments, his imagination foundered in the turbulence of his emotions.

"You may have to some day, my poor Orpheus!" she was laughing back at him.

But the allusion was lost on Durkin, and he cut in with a curt, "What's happened?"

"I want to come home!" It must have been a good night for 'phoning, he felt, as he heard those five cogent words, and an inconsequential little glow suffused him. Not an ohm of their soft wistfulness, not a coulomb of their quiet significance, had leaked

away through all their hundreds of miles of midnight travel. It almost seemed that he could feel the intimate warmth of her arms across the million-peopled cities that separated them; and he projected himself, in fancy, to the heart of the far-off turbulence where she stood. There, it seemed to him, she radiated warmth and color and meaning to the barren wastes of life, a glowing and living ember in all the dead ashes of unconcern. And again it flashed through him, as the wistful cadence of her voice died down on the wire, that she was all that he had in life, and that with her, thereafter, he must rise or sink.

"I want to come home," she was repeating dolefully.

"You've *got* to come, and come quick!"

"What was that?"

"I say, risk it and come," he called back to her. "Something has happened!"

"Something happened? Not bad news, is it?"

"No—but it will open your eyes, when you hear it!"

"Everything at my end has been done, you know."

"You mean it came out all right?"

"Not quite all right, but I think it will do. Is it safe for me to tell you something?"

"Yes, anything in reason, I guess."

"Curry's men in New Orleans are working against him!"

"Let me add something to that. Green and his men are trying to break Curry, and Curry all the time is

laying a mine under every blessed one of them!" and Durkin gave vent to a triumphant chuckle, deep down in his throat.

"Where did you find this out?" the unperturbed and far-away contralto was demanding.

"You could never guess."

"Talk faster, or this telephoning will break us!" she warned him.

"Oh, I don't care—it's worth the money."

"Hello—Hello! Oh, all right. Go on!"

"Your heard about the fire in the Terminal Room of the Postal Union? No—well, some dago with a torch got a little too careless in a P.-U. conduit, and set fire to a cable-splicer's pot of paraffin down on lower Broadway, not much more than a hundred yards from Wall Street itself. Then the flames caught on the burlap and the insulating grease and stuff round the cables—can you hear me? There was the dickens to pay, and in about ten minutes they looked more like a cart-load of old excelsior than the business wires of a few thousand offices!"

"Yes, go on!"

"Well, it stopped nine thousand telephones, and put over two hundred stock-tickers out of business, and cut off nearly five hundred of the Postal-Union wires, and left all lower New York without even fire-alarm service. That's saying nothing of the out-of-town wires, and the long distance service,—did you get all that?"

"Perfectly."

"Well, there's a lot more to tell, but it will keep—say till Thursday night. You may be able to imagine just what it is, from what I've told you; but listen: I think I can open your eyes, when you get here!" he repeated, slowly and significantly.

"All right—even a Great Western wire might have ears, you know!" she warned him.

"Quite so, but how about your Savannah information? There's nothing new?"

"Nothing. But you saw the newspaper stories?"

"The Herald yesterday said the Secretary of Agriculture had demanded from the Savannah Cotton Exchange the name of a wire-house that bulletined a government crop report thirty minutes ahead of the official release."

"Yes, that's Dunlap & Company. They are frantic. They still declare there was no leak, and are fighting it out with the department here at Washington. In the meantime, luckily for us, they are, of course, sending out press-statements saying it was all a coincidence between their firm's private crop-estimate and the actual government report. I couldn't give you much of a margin of time to work on."

"That thirty minutes just gave me time to get in on the up-town quotations. I missed the lower office, of course."

"Hadn't we better hold this over?"

"Yes; I rather forgot—it'll wait until you get here."

"Then Thursday night, at eight, say, at the Grenoble!"

"No, no; make it nine forty-five—I don't get away until then."

"What would the Grenoble people say?"

"That's so—you had better go to the Ralston. It's free and easy. Yes, the Ralston," he repeated. "The Ralston, at nine forty-five, Thursday. Good-bye!"

A moment later he could hear the frantic signal-bell again.

"Hello! Hello! What is it?"

"Hello, New York! Not through yet," said the tired and nasal voice of the operator.

"You forgot something!" It was the contralto voice this time, reproachful and wounded. Durkin laughed a little as he leaned closer to the mouth-piece of his transmitter.

"Good-bye, dearest!" he said.

"Good-bye, my beloved own!" answered the wire, across its hundreds of miles of star-strewn midnight.

Durkin hung up his receiver with a sigh, and stopped at the office to pay his bill. All that was worth knowing and having, all that life held, seemed withdrawn and engulfed in space. He felt grimly alone in a city out of which all reality had ebbed. It seemed to him that somewhere a half-heard lilt of music had suddenly come to a stop.

A spirit of restless loneliness took possession of him, as he stepped out into the crowded solitudes of Broad-

way. His thoughts ran back to the day that he had first met Frances Candler, when, half unwillingly joining forces with MacNutt, he had followed that most adroit of wire-tappers to his up-town house. He remembered his astonishment as the door swung back to MacNutt's secret ring, and Frank stood there in the doorway, looking half timidly out at them, with her hand still on the knob. How far away it seemed; and yet, as the world went, it could be counted in months. He had thought her a mere girl at first, and he recalled how he imagined there had been a mistake in the house number, as he saw the well-groomed figure in black, with its wealth of waving chestnut hair, and the brooding violet eyes with their wordless look of childish weariness. It was only later that he had taken note of the ever betraying fulness of throat and breast, and the touch of mature womanhood in the shadows about the wistful eyes. He remembered, point by point, the slow English voice, with its full-voweled softness of tone, as she answered MacNutt's quick questions, the warm mouth and its suggestion of impulsiveness, the girlishly winning smile with which she had welcomed him as her partner in that house of under-ground operating and unlooked-for adventure, the quick and nervous movements of the muscular body that always carried with it a sense of steely strength half-sheathed in softness.

Bit by bit he recalled their tasks and their perils together.

What touched him most, as he paced the odorous, lamp-hung valley of the Rialto, was the memory of this wistful woman's sporadic yet passionate efforts to lead him back to honesty. Each effort, he knew, had been futile, though for her sake alone he had made not a few unthought of struggles to be decent and open and aboveboard in at least the smaller things of life.

But the inebriation of great hazards was in his veins. They had taken great chances together; and thereafter, he felt, it could be only great chances that would move and stir and hold them. Now he would never be content, he knew, to lounge about the quiet little inns of life, with the memory of those vast adventures of the open in his heart and the thirst for those vast hazards in his veins.

As he turned, in Longacre Square, to look back at that turbulent valley of lights below him, he remembered, incongruously enough, that the midnight Tenderloin was the most thoroughly policed of all portions of the city—the most guarded of all districts in the world. And what a name for it, he thought—the Tenderloin, the tenderest and most delectable, the juiciest and the most sustaining district in all New York, for the lawless egotist, whether his self-seeking took the form of pleasure or whether it took the form of profit!

A momentary feeling of repugnance at what was unlovely in life crept over him, but he solaced himself with the thought that, after all, it was the goodness

in bad people and the badness in good people that held the mottled fabric together in its tight-meshed union of contradictions.

Then his spirit of loneliness returned to him, and his thoughts went back to Frances Candler once more. He wondered why it was that her casual woman's touch seemed even to dignify and concentrate open crime itself. He felt that he was unable, now, to move and act without her. And as he thought of what she had grown to mean to him, of the sustaining sense of coolness and rest which she brought with her, he remembered his first restless night in New York, when he had been unable to sleep, because of the heat in his stifling little bedroom, and had walked the breathless, unknown streets, until suddenly on his face he had felt a cool touch of wind, and the old-time balm of grass and trees and green things had struck into his startled nostrils. It was Central Park that he had stumbled on, he learned later; and he crept into it and fell placidly asleep on one of the shadowy benches.

His memory, as he turned to take a last look down the light-hung cañon of the Rialto, was of the evening that he and his desk-mate, Eddie Crawford, had first driven down that luminous highway, in a taxi, and the lights and the movement and the stir of it had gone to his bewildered young head. For he had leaned out over those titanic tides and exclaimed, with vague and foolish fierceness: "My God, Eddie, some day I'm going to get a grip on this town!"

CHAPTER XV

IT WAS not until night had settled down over the city that Durkin opened the back window of his little top-floor room and peered cautiously out.

There was, apparently, nothing amiss. A noise of pounding came to him from the shipping-room of a lace importer below. A few scattered shafts of light glimmered from the windows opposite. A hazy half-moon slanted down over the house-tops.

When Durkin leaned out of the window for the second time he held in his hand something that looked peculiarly like a fishing-rod. From it dangled two thin green wires, and with the metal hook on the end of it he tested and felt carefully up among the slovenly tangle of wires running out past the overhanging eave.

It was a silly and careless way of doing things, he inwardly decided, this lazy stringing of wires from house-top to house-top, instead of keeping them in the tunnels where they belonged. It was not only violating regulations, but it was putting a premium on "lightning-slinging." And he remembered what Frances had once said to him about criminals in a city like New York, how the careless riot of wealth seemed to breed them, as any uncleanness breeds bacteria;

how, in a way, each was only a natural and inevitable agent, taking advantage of organic waste, seizing on the unguarded and the unorderly. She had even once argued that the criminal could lay claim to a distinct economic value, enjoining, as he did, continual alertness of attention and cleanliness of commercial method.

Yet the devil himself, he had somewhere read, could quote Scripture for his purpose; and his fishing-pole moved restlessly up and down, like a long finger feeling through answering strings. For each time, almost, that his hook rested on one of the wires the little Bunnell relay on the table behind him spoke out feebly. To the trill and clatter of these metallic pulsations Durkin listened intently, until, determining that he had looped into the right wire, he made secure his switch and carefully drew down the window to within an inch of the sill.

Then he gave his studious attention to the little Bunnell relay. Its action was feeble and spasmodic. It was doing scant justice to what Durkin easily saw was a master-hand toying with the rubber button at the far-distant end of the wire. It was not unusually quick operating, but, as the dots and dashes flew on and on, the interloper for a moment or two forgot the meaning of the messages in the clear-cut, crisp, and precise beauty of the sender's Morse.

"That man," commented the admiring craftsman in Durkin, "is earning his eight dollars an hour!"

Then, adjusting his rheostat, he slowly and

cautiously graduated his current, until new life seemed to throb and flow through the busy little piece of clicking metal. A moment later it was speaking out its weighty and secret messages, innocently, authoritatively, almost triumphantly, it seemed to the eavesdropper, bending over the glimmering armature lever.

A quietly predaceous smile broadened on Durkin's intent face. He suddenly smote the table with an impetuous little rap of the knuckles, as he sat there listening.

"By heaven, this *will* open her eyes!" he cried, under his breath.

And he repeated the words more abstractedly, as he lifted his telephone transmitter out on the table and threw open a switch on the wall, well-concealed by the window curtain.

He then adjusted the watch-case receiver to his ear, and settled quietly down in his chair. Striking a match, he held it poised six inches away from the cigar between his teeth. For the sounder had suddenly broken out into life once more, and strange and momentous things were flashing in to him over that little thread of steel. The match burned away and fell from his fingers. He shook himself together with an effort.

Then he snatched up a pencil, and with the watch-case receiver still at his ear and the Bunnell sounder still busy before him, he hurriedly wrote notes on the back of an envelope.

He felt like a lean and empty wharf-rat that had tunnelled into a storehouse of unlimited provision. The very vastness of it amazed and stupefied him. He had been grubbing about for a penny or two, and here he had stumbled across a fabulous-figured bank-note.

Then, as item by item he was able to piece his scattered shreds of information together, his mind became clearer and his nerves grew steadier.

He looked at his watch. It was twenty-six minutes past nine. As he had expected, and as had happened every night since Curry had installed the private wire in his Madison Avenue residence, the operator on the up-town end of the line switched off. The sounder grew still, like a clock that had run down. The telephone wire still carried its occasional message in to him, but he knew that he could wait no longer.

It took him but a minute or two to detach his looping wire from the Curry private line. Then he threw back the switch of his telephone, concealed his transmitter, and caught up his hat and coat.

Five minutes later he was careering up Fifth Avenue in a taxi-cab. A new interest, submerged in the sterner tides of life, drifted in on him as he drew nearer the Ralston and Frances Candler. He began to meditate on how much he had been missing out of existence of late, and even how empty all triumph and conquest might be, if unshared by or with another. Some vague and gently disturbing inkling of just how much a

woman could become to a man, however preoccupied, crept into the quieter backgrounds of his consciousness. And with a man of his walk in life, uncompanioned, isolated, migratory, this muffling and softening element was doubly essential.

He sent his card up to Frances, with an unreasonably beating heart. Word came down to him, in time, that she was engaged, but that she would see him in twenty minutes.

"But I must see her, and at once!" he told the impassive clerk.

It would be possible in twenty minutes, was the second message that came down to him.

Frances engaged—and not able to see him! The very idea of it startled and enraged him. Who had the right to stand between them?—he demanded of himself, with irrational fierceness. And out of the very midst of his soft and consuming eagerness to see her sprang up a mad fire of jealousy and uncertainty. Who was there, he again demanded of himself,—who was there that could come in this way between Frances Candler and himself, at such a time and under such circumstances? After all, her career was one of open and continuous deception. There was MacNutt! And Ottenheimer! And a dozen more! She made it her business to deceive and dupe others, so artfully, so studiously, so laboriously—why would she not use her tools on him as well? Was she, indeed, as open and candid as he had taken her to be?—she, with all

her soft little feline graces, and with all that ambiguous and unknown past of hers!

And yet he remembered how she had held out against him, how he, with his laxer code, had often hurt and wounded every feeling of her sensitive nature. Even before this he had tried to argue that crime in one phase of life implied moral weakness in all other phases of that same career. Yet there she obdurately though pantingly stood, unyielding, stanch, clean of mind and life, a woman of stern honor—and through it all an adventuress and a robber! A blackleg with the conscience of a schoolgirl!—and he laughed inwardly and bitterly at the cheap irony of it all.

His icy and exacting scrutiny of her, as he stepped into her private room, sapped all the warmth out of her greeting. She had thrown on a loose-fitting dressing-gown of pale blue, which showed the white fulness of her arms and throat and darkened the violet of her brooding and seemingly unsatisfied eyes. She was more than beautiful, Durkin had told himself, with a little gulp of anguish. But why had the corroding poison of criminal inclination been poured into a glass so tinted and fragile and lovely to the sight! For there, as he looked at her with still angry and suspicious eyes, he realized, for the first time, just what she was to him, just how completely and implacably she had subjugated him.

"What is it?" she demanded, with a sudden little flutter of fear, standing halfway across the room.

"Who was in this room with you?" he demanded.

She studied his face for a moment or two, slowly shaking her head from side to side. He noticed the tumbled wealth of her glinting chestnut hair, here and there almost a golden red, and again a gulp of anguish swelled at his throat. It was no wonder that MacNutt had good use for her.

"Who has been up here with you?" he repeated miserably, but inexorably.

She seemed to sigh a little, and then her slow English laugh melted out through the room. It was a quiet and sorrowful little laugh, but it shattered the tragedy from the overstrained moment.

"You foolish boy!" she said, half-sorrowfully, as she turned to put the belittered room to rights. "It was the dressmaker I sent for, as soon as I got here. I haven't a rag! You know that! And you know how often you have said that persons in our sort of business ought to dress well."

The mad wave of doubt that still tumbled him back and forth ebbed suddenly away, as a woman of forty, short and stolid, stepped briskly and quietly out of the inner bedroom. She bowed a businesslike good night to them as she passed out into the hallway, carrying a handbag.

"And this is the way you welcome me back!" re-

proved Frances, as she drew away from him and fell to studying his face once more. "Well, we can at least talk business," she added bitterly, on the heels of his awkward silence. "And that, I know, will appeal to you!"

Durkin bowed to the stroke, and even made belated and disjointed efforts of appeasement. But the petals seemed to have fallen from the shaken flower; a teasing sense of her aloofness from him oppressed his mind. In fact, it had always been in the full hue and cry of their adventures with the grim powers of the law that she had seemed nearest to him.

The thought came to him, with a quick sense of terror, of how he might suffer at a time or in a situation not so ridiculously transparent as the present. If, indeed, she ever did give him actual cause for jealousy, how it would rend and tear those roots which had pierced so much deeper than he had ever dreamed! And for a passing moment he felt almost afraid of himself.

CHAPTER XVI

"THEN it wasn't so difficult, after all?" commented Durkin, as Frances ended a description of her three days in Leeksville.

"No, it wasn't the trouble so much—only, for the first time in my life, I felt so—so cruelly alone!" She found it hard to explain it to him adequately. She wondered why it was she should always shrink from undraping any inner corner of her soul to him, why, at times, she should stand so reluctant to win any of the more intimate touches of comradeship from him.

"That's the drawback," he remarked, wide of her mood and thought, "that's the drawback in doing this sort of thing by oneself!"

"We really ought to hunt in pairs, don't you think, like timber wolves?"

She turned and looked at him, with a still mocking and yet a warmer light coming into her eyes. Some propulsion, not of mind, but of body, seemed to drive her involuntarily toward him—like a ship on a lee shore, she felt—as she sniffed delicately at his cigar-scented gloves, so anomalously redolent of virility, of masculinity, of something compelling and masterful, where they lay in her nervously toying fingers. She

tried to laugh at herself, with chastening scorn; but she could not.

"And out of it all," he went on, "when brokerage fees and other things are counted, we have made just three hundred and sixty-seven dollars!"

"Only that?"

"I had no more than the thirty minutes, you see, for a margin to work on!"

She pushed back her hair with a languid hand.

"But why cry over spilt milk?" she asked, wearily. Firmer and firmer, she felt, this mad fever of money-getting was taking hold on him.

"Especially when we seem about to wade knee-deep in cream!"

She made a last effort to fall in with his mood of ruthless aggression.

"Yes; what's this you were going to open my eyes with?"

The final vestige of his clouded restraint slipped away from Durkin's mind.

"I had better start right at the beginning, hadn't I?" he queried, cigar in hand, while she nodded comfortably to the silent question as to whether or not he might smoke.

"I suppose you know that Curry was once a New Orleans cotton broker. It was a little over two years ago that he first came to New York, with about a million and a half of his own, and an available three or four million belonging to a pool that was to back

him through thick and thin. This they did, when he became a member of the Cotton Exchange. Then step by step he began to plan out his campaign, patiently and laboriously plotting and scheming and manipulating and increasing his power, until the newspaper-men dropped into the habit of speaking of him as the Cotton King, and the old home pool itself got a little afraid of him, and held a few secret meetings to talk things over."

"But how did this campaign end?"

"It has not ended. Of just how it will end only two men, outside of Curry and his confidential old head-broker down on the Exchange floor, have any inkling."

"Who is the *other* man?" asked Frances quietly.

Durkin smiled covertly, with a half-mockingly bowed "Thanks!"

"The other man, of course, not counting myself, is the operator, or, rather, the private secretary, he keeps at the home end of the wire he has had put into his house, for carrying on his collateral manipulations, as it were."

"I understand," said Frances.

"And then comes myself," he added confidently.

The woman settled back in her leather-lined armchair, locking her slender white fingers together above her head. The clustered lights of the chandelier threw heavy shadows about her quiet eyes, and for the first time Durkin noticed the tender little hollow just under

her cheek-bones, lending an indescribable touch of tragedy to the old-time softer oval of her face.

"Now this is what our friend Curry has been doing, in a nutshell. For months and month he has been the acknowledged bull leader of the Exchange. Point by point, week by week and day by day, he has managed to send cotton up. Where it was at first 11 and 12 and perhaps 13 cents, he has shouldered, say, August cotton up to 16.55, and July up to 17.30 and May up to 17.20. Day before yesterday July cotton advanced to 17.65 in New Orleans. Some time, and some time mighty soon—if not to-morrow, then the next day, or perhaps even the next—every option is going to go still higher. And this man Curry is the imperial dictator of it all. He is known to have interests behind him that amount to millions now. And this is the point I'm coming to: this present week is to see the rocket go up and burst."

Durkin was on his feet by this time pacing up and down the room.

"The first, but not the final, climax of all this plotting is twenty-cent cotton."

"Has it ever been that before?"

"Never! It has not been above seventeen cents, not since 1873!" declared Durkin, excitedly. "But here is the important part of it all, the second climax, as it were. When it strikes nineteen his old home pool are going to abdicate. They are going to turn traitor on him, I mean, and suddenly stand from un-

der. Then here is the third and last climax: Curry knows this fact; he knows they're making ready to crush him. And when they get ready he's going to turn and smash 'em, smash 'em and sling 'em down, even though he goes with them in the crash. Which he won't, if he's the Curry I take him to be. In other words, Frank, at the right moment he is going to abdicate from the bull movement absolutely, before it is publicly realized."

"It all seems vague and misty to me—but I suppose you know."

"Know? Why, I've been rioting through his holy of holies for two days now. I've been cutting in and reading his own private wire. He firmly intends to forsake this bull movement, which, apparently, he has spent so much time and toil in building up. But in reality, out of the crash that comes with a collapsing market—and it must collapse when he stands from under!—he is to sit and see a million or two rain down into his lap."

"But can he, one solitary man, do all this—I mean do it unmistakably, inevitably?"

"Yes, he can. I firmly believe that nothing short of a miracle can now upset his plan. To-day he is not only the leader of the cotton pit; he is both openly and tacitly the supreme dictator of the market—of the world's market. Why, last week, when he publicly announced that he was going down to Lakewood for a couple of days, the market fell back to 12.85 for an

hour or two, and he had to jump in and start buying, just to give a little order to things. Somebody even said that when his wife and an actress friend of hers visited the Exchange gallery he asked them if they'd like to see a little panic on the floor. The actress said she'd love to see cotton go up a few points if he wouldn't mind. Curry said all right, to watch out for some real acting. So he started down into the pit and pulled the strings until his puppets danced to their hearts' content."

Frances nodded her appreciation of the scene's dramatic values, and waited for Durkin to continue.

"And one minor result of that was that one hour later a well-known cotton merchant was found in his chair, with a slowly widening stain of red on his shirt front, as the evening papers put it. He had shot himself through the heart—utterly ruined by that last little capricious rise in our Cotton King's market."

"Who, after all, is not much better than a wire-tapper!" exclaimed the woman, with her mirthless little laugh of scorn.

"There's a difference—he thinks in big figures and affairs; we, up till now, have worked and worried and fretted over little things. This man Curry, too, is a sort of Napoleon. 'You have to smash the eggs to make your omelet,' was all he said when he heard that a big brokerage firm had closed its one hundred and twenty-five offices because of his bull operations. Why, this week he's making his clerks eat and sleep

right in the offices—he's turned one of the rooms into a sort of dormitory, and has their meals sent up to them. And outside of all this he's manipulating his own underground movement, doing that over his home wire, after his regular office hours."

"And this is the wire you have tapped?"

"Yes, that's the wire that has been giving me my information—or, rather, little scattered shreds of it. But here, mind, is where the difficulty comes in. Curry has got to let his partner, Green, down in New Orleans, in on the last movement of his campaign, so that the two can strike together. But he is wise, and he isn't trusting that tip to any open wire. When the time comes it's to be a cipher message. It will read, 'Helen sails'—then such and such a time on such and such a day. That message Curry's confidential operator will send out over the wire, under the protection of a quadruplex, from his Wall Street office. And that is the message I have to intercept."

She was moving her head slowly up and down, gazing at him with unseeing eyes.

"And you have some plan for doing it?"

"Precisely," replied Durkin, wheeling nervously back and forth. "This is where I've got to run the gauntlet of the whole Postal-Union system, cut in on their double-guarded wires, and get away with my information without being caught."

"But you can't do it, Jim. It's impossible."

"Oh, but it *is* possible, quite possible!" he said, halt-

ing for a moment before her. "Here's where the climax comes to my story—the one I started to tell you over the 'phone. You see, just at the time of that little conduit fire the Postal Union Company was having trouble with the Electrical Workers' Union. I happened to be laying in the supplies for that up-town loop of mine when I found they were offering two dollars an hour for expert work. I jumped on a Broadway car, and took the plunge."

"What plunge, Jim?"

"I mean that I applied for work, down there, as a cable-splicer."

"Wasn't it dangerous work—for *you*, I mean?"

"Yes, a trifle so, I suppose. But none of the inside men were on the force. No one knew me there, from Adam. And it was worth it, too!"

"You mean, of course—?"

"I mean that a certain cable-splicer has the entrée to that conduit, that he has a hand-made chart as to its wire-disposition, and—well, several other things!"

He waited for some word of appreciative triumph from her. As she remained silent, he went on again.

"And I mustn't forget to tell you that I've leased a little basement place not far from Pine Street. I'm going to do commercial printing and that sort of thing. I've got a sign out, and the power all ready, only my presses are slow in coming!"

"And will be still further delayed, I suppose?"

"Yes, I'm afraid they will."

Some mysterious touch of his excitement at last communicated itself to the listening woman, almost against her will. She was as fluctuant, she told herself, as the aluminum needle of a quadrant electrometer. No, she was more like the helpless little pith-ball of an electroscope, she mentally amended, ever dangling back and forth in a melancholy conflict of repulsion and attraction. Yet, as she comprehended Durkin's plot, point by point, she began to realize the vast possibilities that confronted them, and, as ever before, to fall a victim to the zest of action, the vital sting of responsibility. Nor did she allow herself to lose sight of the care and minuteness of the continued artfulness and finish, so teeming with its secondary æsthetic values, with which he had reconnoitered his ever-menacing territory and laid his mine. And added to this, she saw, was the zest of stalking the stalker: it carried with it an ameliorating tang of dramatic irony, an uncouth touch of poetic justice.

As often happened with her in moments of excitement, the expanded pupils of her violet eyes crept over and all but blotted out the iris, until out of the heavy shadows that hung under her full brow, they glowed faintly, in certain lights, with an animal-like luminousness. "Those eyes—they look as though a halo had melted and run down into them!" Durkin had once cried, half wonderingly, half playfully, as he turned her face from shadow to light and back to shadow again.

He had looked for some word of disapproval from her, for he could remember how often, with her continuous scruples, she had taken the razor-edge off his enthusiasm, when he stood on the brink of adventuring with something big and momentous. So he studied her face abstractedly, his own alight with an eager and predaceously alert look which only his half-whimsical, half-boyish smile held above the plane of sheer vulpine craftiness.

"Why, this man Curry," he went on, still standing in front of her, "has got such a grip on the market that he can simply juggle with it. Before this boom you or I could buy a bale of cotton on a dollar margin. Today, most of the brokerage houses insist on a four dollar margin, some of them demanding a five, and it's said that a ten dollar margin can still be looked for."

"But still, I don't see how one man can do this, and keep it up!"

"It's mostly all the natural outcome of his own, individual, long-headed plot. Beyond that, it's a mere infection, a mania, an operation of mob-law, the case of sheep following a sheep. Curry, all along, is crying out that the demand has outgrown the supply, and that the commercial world has got to get used to the idea of twenty-cent cotton. In the old days it used to sell away down around six cents, and ever since then mills have been increasing their spindles,—in ten years, Curry's papers claim, the mills have added more than

seventeen million spindles to swell this tremendous cry for cotton. That's his argument, to tide him along until he kicks the post out, and the drop comes. Then of course, he and the rest of his bull pool have been buying, buying, buying, always openly and magnificently, yet all the while, selling quietly and secretly."

"And they call this legitimate business?" she demanded, with the familiar tinge of scorn in her voice.

"Yes, they call it high finance. But it's about as legitimate, on the whole, as the pea and thimble game I used to watch up at the county fairs in Canada. In other words, Frank, when we carry on our particular line of business cleanly and decently, we are a hanged sight more honest than these Exchange manipulators."

"But not recognized!" she cut in, for she knew that with this unction of comparison he was salving a still tender conscience.

"That's because we are such small fry," he went on heatedly. "But, by heavens, when we get this thing going, I guess we'll rather count a little!"

"And what is to keep us from getting it going?"

He wheeled on her suddenly.

"One thing, and one hard thing!"

"Well?"

"Within twenty-four hours we have got to have ten thousand dollars!"

CHAPTER XVII

"TEN thousand dollars is a great deal of money!" said Frank, easily, with a languid shrug of her shoulders.

"It *is* a great deal! But we're up against a great deal! If we had twice as much, it would be even better. I have a possible twelve hundred now, altogether—just a scrawny, miserable twelve hundred! I got most of it yesterday, through dabbling in this cotton of Curry's. Tomorrow morning every cent of it goes down to Robinson & Little, and if the market is moderately steady, and he takes a two dollar margin, knowing what I do, it means I double that amount before the day's trading is over."

"Robinson & Little? Who are they? New friends of yours?"

"They are the big Wall Street people. I had to pay two hundred dollars—in I. O. U. form,—for a letter to that firm. I still have a suspicion it was forged, too. I've been getting acquainted with them, however, and showing them that I'm all right. When the eleventh hour comes, and when I have to cut in on Curry's Postal-Union wire down-town, we'll have to tear around to Robinson & Little's, flop over with the

market, and buy cotton short, on a stop-order. It all depends upon what margin we may have to put up, whether we make forty thousand dollars, or a hundred and forty thousand dollars. Curry, you may be sure, will try to start the thing off as quietly as possible. So a normal market will bring a more normal margin, and give us something worth while to play on!"

"Something worth while?" she mused absently. Then she came and stood by Durkin, and studied his face once more. Some sense of his isolation, of his unhappy aloofness from his kind, touched and wrung her feeling. She caught at his arm with a sudden companionable enthusiasm, and joined him in pacing the room.

"After all, there *would* be something big, and wide, and sweeping about this sort of work, wouldn't there?"

"Yes; it's a blamed sight better than pool-room piking!" he cried. "It's living; it's doing things!"

"I believe I could plunge in it, and glory in it!" she went on, consolingly.

"There's just one drawback—just one nasty little blot on the face of the fun," he ventured, catching at the sustaining arm of her enthusiasm.

"And that is—?"

"We've got to get this ten thousand dollars just for a day or two!"

"But have you any idea as to how, or where, or when?"

"Yes, I have," he answered, looking at her steadily. There seemed to be some covert challenge in his glance, but she faced him unwaveringly.

"Say it out, Jim; I'm not afraid!"

"I mean *you* must get it! You've got to borrow it!"

He began bravely enough, but he hesitated before the startled scorn on her face.

"You mean I've—I've got to steal it?"

He held up a protesting hand. Then he went to the half-open door of her inner room and closed it carefully.

"No; as I said before, we can not and must not steal it. It may be called theft, of course, but every cent of it will be returned. No, no; listen to me—I have it all figured out. Only, it has to be done this very night!"

"Tonight?" she said, with a reproving little cry.

"Yes, tonight! And that is why I've been desperate, of course, and have been looping every telephone wire that runs near my up-town room, hoping against hope for a chance to pick up something to work on. The only thing that gave me that chance was Theodore Van Schaick's house wire. Now, listen. Two days ago his daughter Lydia came of age. I could tell you most of the things she got, and how she has been 'phoning gratitude and thanks and girlish messages out round the city. But among other things Miss Lydia Van Schaick received from her father, was a small and neat bundle not long out of the Sub-Treasury. It was

made up of one hundred equally neat little pieces of parchment, and each one of them is a one-hundred dollar banknote."

"And I'm to crawl through one of her windows, and burglarize the house of this amount!"

"No, no, Frank—listen to me a moment. Yesterday, Miss Lydia telephoned her Uncle Cedric about this money. Not being used to a small fortune in ready cash, naturally, she feels nervous about having it around, and wants to put it somewhere. Her level-headed old Uncle Cedric advised her to take it down tomorrow to the Second National Bank, and open a deposit account with it. And this Lydia intends to do. Tonight her ten thousand dollars are laid carefully away in a glove-box, in one of her chiffonier drawers, in her own private bedroom. So tonight is our only chance!"

"Couldn't I sand-bag her in the morning, on her way down-town?" demanded Frances, with mock seriousness. She had learned not to ask too much of life, and she was struggling to school herself to the thought of this new rôle.

"No, my dear girl; it can be done so much easier than that. Her mother and her younger sister are still at Driftwood, their summer place in Mamaroneck. At four o'clock this afternoon they sent into the city a certain Miss Annie Seabrooke. She is a St. Luke's graduate, a professional nurse who has been looking after old Mrs. Van Schaick. This lady, apparently, is

a good deal of a hypochondriac. The nurse, of course, has to get things ready for her patient's return. I have already met Miss Seabrooke at the Grand Central Station. I have also, at Miss Lydia's urgent request, installed her at the Holland House, over night. This, by the way, is the lady's bag. I tried to explain to her that the whole Van Schaick house wants to be given over to Miss Lydia's coming-of-age function."

Frances, already carried down again by her tidal reaction of feeling, watched him through narrowed and abstracted eyes.

"In this bag, among other things, you'll find a nurse's uniform," Durkin went on hurriedly, oblivious of her scrutiny. "It will fit a little loose, I'm afraid—Miss Seabrooke is a big, wide-shouldered Canadian girl. And in forty or fifty minutes from now you ought to be inside that uniform and inside the Van Schaick house—if we ever want to carry this thing through!"

"And then—?" she asked, in her dead and impersonal voice, as though her thoughts were leagues away.

"Then," cried Durkin, "then you've got to get hold of a glove-box in Miss Lydia Van Schaick's chiffonier drawer. By some means or other we've got to get hold of that box, and—"

She stopped him, by holding up a sudden silencing hand. Her face was white and set; he could see none of the iris of her eyes.

"It's no use!" she said, evenly and quietly. "It's no use. I can not and will not do it!"

Durkin fell back from her, aghast. Then he took her by the arm, and turned her about so that the light fell on her face. He could see that her lower lip was trembling.

"You back down—*now?*" he demanded, with a touch of incredulity.

"Yes, I back down!" she answered, letting her eyes meet his.

"Why—" he began, inadequately. "What is it?"

"It's simply this, Jim," she answered him—and her voice, now, was high and thin and unmodulated, constricted, by some inward tension, to a gramaphonic tumult of syllables. "There has got to be a limit, somewhere. At some point we have got to draw the line. We have been forgetting a great many things. But I can not and will not be a common thief—for you—or for anything you can bring to me—or to my life!"

"You say *that?*"

"Yes, I do; and if you cared for me—if you thought of my feelings—if you thought of my happiness, you would never ask me to do such things—you would never make me suffer like this!"

He threw up his hands with what was almost a gesture of exasperation.

"But you will *not* be a common thief—it will not be stealing at all! Can't you see that?"

"No, I can not. And you know as well as I know, that when we try to justify it we do it only by a quibble!"

"But I tell you every penny of that money will go back where it came from!"

"Then why can't we go to Lydia Van Schaick and ask her to lend us the money?"

"That's ridiculous!"

"No more so than what you propose!"

Durkin, drawing back from her, closed his right fist and with it pounded angrily on the palm of his left hand.

"If you're going to back down I *will* go to Lydia Van Schaick, and I'll get her money, too. I'll go as a second-story man, as a porch-climber! I'll go after that money as a common burglar and house-breaker. But I'll get it, in the end, or know the reason why!"

"Oh!" she gasped, horrified. "You wouldn't! You couldn't!"

"I say I will!" he cried, in a passion.

"Oh, you couldn't!" she reiterated.

"Couldn't I?—I've got this machinery started, and it's going to be kept moving!"

Something in the scene carried her years back, to the times when her father, emerging from his prolonged orgies, sick and shaken, stormed and wept for the brandy she struggled to keep away from him—and the struggle would end only, when in fear of his collapse, she surrendered the bottle to his quivering fingers.

"My God—I've *got* to have it!" Durkin was crying and storming

There crept over her the same, slowly eviscerating pity for the defiant man who now stood before her, so tragically weak in his very protests of strength.

She turned and caught at his arm, with a sudden inward surrender that left her dazed and tottering. She struggled in vain to keep down her tears, once more torn by that old and costly and compromising hunger to be loved and sustained by him. She could not live in the face of his anger; she could not endure his hate. And the corroding bitterness, the gnawing tragedy, of her life lay in the fact that the arm to which she must turn for support was the very arm that would forever drag and hold her down.

Yet she was inarticulate, in the face of it all. She could not plead; she could not explain. She could only break out with a sudden unreasoning and passionate cry of: *"You are not kind to me!"*

Durkin had already shaken her hand from his arm, and was on the point of a second outburst. Then he stopped, and the gathering anger and revolt ebbed out of his face, for at that tearful and passionate cry from her he knew that the battle between them had come to an end. He knew, with an exultation in which even pity and cruelty were strangely entangled, that it was a sign of her inward capitulation, that he had won her over.

"Frank!"

He swung about, suddenly, and with one clasp of his arms let wide the flood-gates of her strained emotions.

"Good God!" he cried. "You know I hate it, as much as you do! But can't you see it's too late now, to quibble and vacillate? Can't you see that I'm getting nothing more out of it than you?"

He pleaded with her, hotly, impetuously. He showed her how he needed her, how he was helpless without her. He held her, and kissed the tears from her unhappy eyes—he could see them droop, pitifully, as with a narcotic, at his first intimate and tender touch. He would have to sway her now, he felt, not through her judgment, not by open attack, but only by those more circuitous and subterranean approaches of feminine feeling. And still he expostulated and pleaded, unnerving and breaking her will with his cruel kindnesses of word and caress.

"Oh, I'll do it!" she cried, at last, mopping her stained face. "I'll do it, Jim, if I have to!"

"But there's nothing so terrible in it, Dear Heart," he assuaged. "We've been through worse things together. And it will be made right again, every penny of it!"

"Jim," she said slowly, as she grew calmer once more; "Jim, I want you to give me your word of honor that it *will* be made right! I'm—I'm too cowardly, yet, to do a thing that's wickedness, through and through. I've got to see some glimmer of right in it, I've got to feel that it will end right, even—"

"But this *will* end right! It can't help it. I give you my word of honor, now, to save you from being what

you might seem, that every cent of this woman's money goes back to her."

She was moving her head slowly up and down, as she studied his face.

"Then you must remember, through it all, how much I'm trusting myself to you," she said, with a forlornness that brought a lump in his throat, as she looked about the room with hopeless eyes. "Do you realize how hard all this is going to be?"

"It's not easy, I know—but it's our only chance."

"*Is* it our only chance?" she suddenly asked. "Life is full of chances. I saw one today, if I'd only known."

She looked at him again, with some new light sifting through all her tangle of clouds. "Yes," she went on, more hopefully, "there *might* be still another way!"

"Well?" he asked, almost impatiently, as he glanced at his watch.

"It was something that happened when I went into that little Postal-Union office at Broadway and Thirty-seventh Street." She was speaking rapidly now, with a touch of his former fire. "The relays and everything are in the same room, you know, behind the counter and a wire screen. I wanted my dressmaker, and while I was sitting at a little side-desk chewing my pen-handle and trying to boil seventeen words down to ten, a man came in with a rush message. I could see him out of the corner of my eye. It was Sunset Bryan, the race-track plunger, and it occurred to me that it might be worth while to know what he was sending out."

"Did he see you, or does he know you?"

"I took good pains that he shouldn't see me. So I scrawled away on my blank, and just sat there and read the ticker as the operator took the despatches off the file and sent them out. Here is the wording of Sunset Bryan's message, as well as I can remember it: 'Duke—of—Kendall—runs—tomorrow—get—wise—and—wire—St. Louis—and—South!'"

"Well, what of it?" Durkin asked.

"Why, this Bryan is the man who took one hundred and ten thousand dollars out of the Aqueduct ring in one day. Since the Gravesend Meeting began, people say he has made nearly half a million. He's a sort of race-track Curry. He keeps close figures on every race he plays. He has one hundred men and more on his pay roll, and makes his calculations after the most minute investigating and figuring. It stands to reason that he manipulates a little, though the Pinkerton men, as I suppose you know, have never been able to get him off the Eastern tracks. Now, Jim, my firm belief is that there is something 'cooked up,' as they say, for tomorrow afternoon, and if we could only find out what this Duke of Kendall business is, we might act on it in time."

She waited for Durkin to speak. He tapped the top of his head, meditatively, with his right forefinger, pursing his lips as his mind played over the problem.

"Yes, we might. But how are we to find out what the Duke of Kendall and his mere running means?"

"I even took the trouble to look up the Duke of Kendall. He is a MacIntosh horse, the stable companion to Mary J., and ridden by Shirley, a new jockey."

She could see that he had little sympathy for her suggestion, and she herself lost faith in the plan even as she unfolded it.

"My idea was, Jim, that this horse was going to run—is *sure* to run, under heavy odds, for what they call 'a long shot.'"

"But still, how would we be able to make sure?"

"I could go and ask Sunset Bryan himself."

Durkin threw up his hand with a gesture of angry disapproval.

"That beast! He's—he's unspeakable! He's the worst living animal in America!"

"I shouldn't be afraid of him," she answered, quietly.

"The whole thing comes too late in the game, anyway," broke in Durkin, with a second gesture of disgust. Then he added, more gently: "Good heavens, Frank, I don't want to see *you* mixed up with that kind of cur! It wouldn't be right and fair! It's infinitely worse than the thing I'm suggesting!"

"After all, we are not so different, he and I," she responded, with acidulated mildness.

Durkin took her hand in his, with real pain written on his face.

"Don't talk that way," he pleaded; "it hurts!"

She smoothed his hair with her free hand, quietly, maternally.

"Then you had rather that I—I borrowed this money from the Van Schaick house?" she asked him.

"It's the choice of two evils," he answered her, out of his unhappiness, all his older enthusiasm now burnt down into the ashes of indifferency.

"If only I was sure you could keep your promise," she said, dreamily, as she studied his face.

"It *will* go back!" he responded determinedly, shrugging off his momentary diffidence. "Even though I have to make it, dollar by dollar, and though it takes me twenty years! But I tell you, Frank, that it will not be needed. Here we have the chance of a life time. If we only had the money to start with, the whole business could be carried on openly and decently —barring, of course," he added, with his sudden shamefaced smile, "the little bit of cutting-in I'll have to do down-town on the Curry wires!"

"One minute—before we go any farther with this. Supposing we successfully get this glove-box, and successfully watch Curry, and on the strength of our knowledge invest this money, and get our returns, and find ourselves with enough—well, with enough not to starve on—will you promise me this: that it will be the last?"

"But why should it be the last?"

"You know as well as I do! You know that I want to be honest, to live straight and aboveboard; but a hundred times more, that I want to see you honest and aboveboard!"

He studied the tense and passionate mood that flitted across her face, that seemed to deepen the shadows about her brooding violet eyes.

"I would do anything for you, Frank!" he said, with an inadequate and yet eloquent little outthrust of the arms.

"Then do this for me! Let us get back to the daylight world again!"

"But would it satisfy us? Would we—?"

"Would we—?" she echoed forlornly. Then she turned suddenly away, to hide a trace of inconsequential tears.

"We have got to!" she cried out passionately over her shoulder, as she stooped to the suit-case and deftly opened it. A moment later she was rummaging hurriedly through its neatly packed contents.

"And I am Mrs. Van Schaick's trained nurse?" she asked, ruminatively.

"Yes, Miss Annie Seabrooke, remember!"

"But the others—the servants—won't they know me?"

"You were engaged in Mamaroneck; not one of the city servants has seen your face."

"But it will be eleven and after—was my train delayed?"

"No, not delayed; but you took a later train."

She was silent for a minute or two, as she probed deeper into the suit-case.

"You haven't promised!" she murmured, her face

still low over the womanly white linen, and the little cap and apron and uniform which she was gently shaking out before her.

She rose to her feet and turned to him.

"I promise you—anything!" he cried, in the teeth of all his inner misgivings. He followed her to the open window.

"Then kiss me!" she said, with a little exhausted sigh of ultimate surrender, as she sank into his arms and her lonely and hungry body felt the solace of his strength about and above it. And in that minute they lost all count of time and place, and for them, with the great glimmering granite city stretching away at their feet, there was neither past nor future.

CHAPTER XVIII

FRANCES Candler waited until complete quiet reigned over the house. Then she noiselessly opened her door and peered up and down the darkened hallway.

A sudden thought came to her, as she stood there in the silence, and, slipping back to her room, she took first a hot-water bottle out of her nurse's bag, and then a hypodermic syringe from its neat little morocco case. Miss Annie Seabrooke, she decided, had been making melancholy use of her knowledge of drugs. That enlightened young lady was, obviously, addicted to the use of morphine, for beside the syringe-case Frances found a little bottle bearing its telltale chemical formula: $C_{17}\ H_{19}\ NO_3$.

She removed the screw-top from the graduated "barrel," and in its place adjusted the glistening little hollow needle. Then she carefully filled the graduated tube with its innocent-looking liquid, and, wrapping the syringe in her pocket-handkerchief, thrust it into the bosom of her bodice. Many things lay ahead of her, and before the night was out even this might be of use. She devoutly hoped not—yet the present moment, she warned herself, was no time for hesitations and compunctious half-measures.

The hot-water bottle she carried openly in her hand, as she once more softly opened the door and crept out into the half-lighted hallway.

They had given her a room on the third floor, a concession, she imagined, to the established dignity of her profession. Most of the servants slept on the fourth floor. It had, accordingly, been by way of the front stairs that the bibulous English butler, with more than one sidelong blink of admiration had brought her up to her quarters for the night.

She felt that she would like to find the back stairway, the stairway by which the household servants came and went.

She moved forward softly, listening a second at doorways as she passed. It crept through her mind at that moment, incongruously enough, how like her own future lay this silent and unknown house, with its dark entanglement of possibilities, its network of unknown dangers and surprises, its staid and unbetraying doors behind which so much or so little might anywhere dwell.

Then she suddenly stood transfixed, panting a little. For the sound of approaching footsteps fell on her startled ear.

To turn and run was out of the question, for she had no knowledge of where or into what she might flee. To hesitate longer would be equally fatal. Instant action only could save her. As quick as thought she opened the door on her left, and stepped inside.

"Is it you, Adolph?" a whispered voice asked quietly, out of the gloom. It was a woman's voice—she must have been a young woman, Frances commiseratively felt—a voice that was neither startled nor unhappy.

She stood, then, in one of the servants' rooms. She pictured to herself the different faces she had seen below stairs, though in none of them could she remember any sign or hint of what she had now stumbled upon. But the pregnancy of that muffled question gave her a flashing consciousness of the wheels within even those inner wheels in the dark and complicated mills of life.

"Hsssssh!" said the intruder softly, as she quickly swung to the door, padding it with her hand.

She stood there, waiting until the steps passed by. They were brisk, businesslike steps, those of a woman, mingled with the tinkling of a chain of keys. She surmised that it was the housekeeper, on her last rounds for the night.

She realized the peril of another minute in the room. The wiring of the house, she had already noticed, with the quickness of an expert, was both thorough and modern. Any moment the turning of a bedside button might flood the room with brilliant light and leave her there, betrayed beyond redemption.

"Sssssssh!" she said again sharply, as though in warning, and a moment later dodged out through the door, going as noiselessly as she had come.

But the ground was now dangerous, she felt; and

she was glad to escape to the comparative freedom of a wider hallway, running at right angles to the one she had just left. This surely led to the back stairs, she argued, as she groped her way steadily forward. She was even debating whether it would not be better to risk the fully-lighted front stairs, rather than lose time as she was doing, when her groping hands came in contact with the cool wood of the polished balustrade.

Her foot was on the carpeted second step, when she drew back, with a terrified catch of the breath.

The familiar click of the light-button had thrown the entire hall and stairway into dazzling light. A man stood at the foot of the stairs, in his slippered feet, with his hand still on the button. He had not yet seen her; but it was too late to escape.

It was the bibulous English butler who had shown her to her room. In a crook of his arm he carried a Sauterne bottle and a nearly empty champagne magnum, carefully recorked. It was plain, Frances argued, that he was pilfering a nightcap for himself. That gave her at least a shred of courage.

She hesitated only the fraction of a second. Then she coldly and briskly descended the stairs, with her hot-water bottle in her hand.

The butler fell back a step or two at the sudden apparition, blinked at her unsteadily in the strong light, and made a gigantic effort to draw himself up.

Her first intention had been to march disdainfully

past him; but this, she remembered, was out of the question. It was already midnight, or more, and for all his unsteadiness of limb he was, she knew, a shrewd and capable servant, well trained in his duties.

"Well, miss, what is it?" She could see him putting on his official attitude, just as he might draw on his serving-coat. The new nurse, apparently, took cold easily, for she still wore her galoshes.

"Which way do I go to the kitchen?" she demanded curtly.

"The kitchen, miss, is closed." He was looking at her with his pale and beady little eyes. "What were you wanting?"

"I must have some hot water," she answered, swaying her instruments of deliverance before her.

"There is a bathroom on your floor, miss, two doors to the right of your own door." He spoke thickly but peremptorily. Frances could plainly see that he was not to be juggled with.

"I said hot water, not warm," she retorted, almost angrily.

"You'll find an electric heater in the bathroom, miss," he added, more respectfully. She tried to wither him with a look, but it was unavailing. He even preceded her to her own door, turning the lights on and off as they went.

A moment later, as she stood biting the end of her fingers in mingled vexation and anxiety, she could hear the sound of running water. She wondered,

dreadingly, if she was never to get rid of the man. As she waited she let down her hair.

The butler appeared with a steaming pitcher. He entered unsteadily, to her preoccupied "Come!" He looked at her over his shoulder as he put the steaming pitcher down, on her dresser.

"A damned fine girl!" he said to himself, as he looked at her for a second time, and seemed loath to leave. In fact, months afterward, he dilated to the second cook on the wonder of that chestnut hair, which now fairly blanketed the girl's head and shoulders.

"Are you in pain, miss?" he asked anxiously, coming nearer to her. His attitude was cogent, and yet non-committal.

"No," she said icily, and then she added, more discreetly, "No—not much."

"Just—er—where does it seem to be?" he ventured, brazenly.

She was silent now, distraught with mingled revulsion and anxiety.

"Is it here, miss?" he persisted, with easy and masterful solicitude, reaching out as though to touch her with his intrepid and insolent hand. The woman drew back with a shudder, white to the very lips. This was the penalty, she told herself, for the ways she had fallen into! This was the possible degradation that even Durkin had been willing to lead her into!

She fell back from him, and stood against the wall,

struggling to calm herself. For the feeling swept over her that she must scream aloud, to rend and scatter what seemed the choking mists of a nightmare. Yet her masterful tormentor, misjudging the source of her emotion, still stood blinking at her soulfully.

"Isn't there anything I can do for you?" he wheedled, meltingly, yet militantly.

It would have been laughable, under other circumstances, Frances tried to make herself believe—this solicitous tenderness of an unmannerly English butler, placidly extending to her the gallantries of the servants' quarters. Now, she saw only the perils of the situation.

"You can leave this room," she said, steadily, in answer to his question. She saw the look of stolid revolt that swept over his face, and she could have wrung her hands, in the extremity of her fear.

"Won't you want anything fetched, later?" he still persecuted her.

"Yes, yes," she cried, desperately; "but not now!"

"When?" he demanded, wagging his head, sagely.

"The later the better!" she answered, slowly, with a final and desperate craftiness, pointing to the door.

A sudden flame of audacious heat crept into the bloated face before her. He would still have tarried an admiring moment or two, but she returned his gaze, unfalteringly, for thirty resolute seconds. He wavered, mumbled something in his throat, flung one final melting leer at her, and then turned and crept

from the room, nursing his two bottles in the crook of his arm as he went.

"Oh, thank God, thank God!" she cried, with a throaty little sob.

Then a second shudder, as momentarily benumbing as a chill, swept over her from head to foot. A sudden passion to get out where she could breathe and move took its place—at whatever ultimate loss—only to get away from that house of engulfing horrors.

The mood passed, with the passing of her fright, and she shook her tired nerves together with an effort. Then still once more she groped her way out through the darkness. Now, however, there was neither trepidation nor hesitancy in her silent movements, as she flitted through the hallway and passed like a shadow down the dark stairs.

She paused only once—at the door which she knew was Lydia Van Schaick's bedroom. In an oriel window, opposite this door, was a little alcove fitted up with bookshelves, a highly polished writing-table, and two low-seated rattan lounging-chairs. On one end of the writing-table stood a flat silver vase holding a spray of roses; on the other end stood a desk-telephone transmitter and an oblong folio of green morocco, with "Telephone Addresses" stamped in gold on its richly tooled cover. All this Frances noticed with one quick glance, as, nursing the knob in her cautious fingers, she turned it slowly.

The door was securely locked, from the inside.

One chance remained to her—by way of the little white-tiled bathroom, which she had caught a glimpse of on her first journey up through the house. This bathroom, she knew, would open into the girl's boudoir itself.

This door was unlocked. A moment later she was inside, and the door was closed behind her. She groped carefully across the tiled flooring until her finger-tips came in contact with the second door, which creaked a little at her touch, for it stood a few inches ajar.

This door she opened, inch by inch, in terror of that tiny hinge-creak. It was a sleeping-room, she knew, the moment she had crept inside; and it held a sleeper, for the air seemed laden with its subtle yet quite immaterial fragrance of warmth—vivified, as it were, with some intangible exhalation of its sleeping life.

She listened with strained attention, hoping to overhear the quiet and regular breathing of the sleeper. But no sound reached her ears.

Through the muffled darkness she could dimly make out the open doorway leading into what must be the girl's sitting-room. In that room, Frances felt, would stand the chiffonier.

She felt her way to the foot of the bed. There she stood, strained second after second, still listening. No sound came from the sleeper. But, awed, for reasons that lay beyond the reach of her restless thought, she could feel the presence of the other life there, as dis-

tinctly as though the room had been steeped in noonday light; and as she waited and listened there came to her a sense of the mystery of sleep, a feeling that, after all, this briefest midnight slumber was only a lighter and younger sister to that endless sleep of death itself.

Step by step, then, she crawled and edged her way into the second vault of black silence, feeling with outstretched fingers for each piece of furniture. The mirror-laden chiffonier, some womanly intuition told her, would stand between the two heavily curtained windows.

Her feelings had not misled her. It was a well-made piece of furniture, and the top drawer opened noiselessly. This was explored with light and feverish fingers, as a blind woman might explore it. But it held nothing but laces and scattered bits of jewelry, and filmy things she could not name and place.

The second drawer opened less readily, and a key had been left in the lock. She touched the little leather boxes, deciding that they must be jewel-cases, and methodic little layers of silk and linen, and a package or two of papers. Then her fingers fell on something cold, and hard, and purposeful. It was a woman's little revolver, obviously, with a jeweled handle. She explored the trigger-guard and the safety-latch with studious fingers, and decided that it was a 32-calibre hammerless.

Then her startled hand went up to her lips, and

she wheeled noiselessly about where she stood. It could not have been a sound that she heard. It was only a presence that had made itself felt, to some sixth sense in her.

No; it was nothing that she had heard or seen, but she leaned forward and studied the surrounding gloom intently, from side to side.

Acting under some quick subliminal impulse, she picked the little hammerless weapon up out of the drawer, with one hand, while her other hand explored its farther end. This exploring hand felt feverishly along the edges of what seemed a mother-of-pearl writing-portfolio, and rummaged quickly and deftly down among laces and silk, until her fingers came in contact with the glazed surface of a little oblong box.

There could be no two thoughts as to what that box was. It was the glove-box which held that particular package for which she had already dared so much.

An awakened and alert sixth sense still warned her of something ominous and imminent; but there was neither fear nor hesitation in her actions as she drew out the little oblong box and with quick fingers thrust it, along with the toy-like hammerless, into the bosom of her dress.

Then she took three stealthy steps forward—and once again caught her breath sharply.

"Somebody is in this room!"

The intruder and thief fell back, step by step, gropingly, until she touched the chiffonier once more.

"Somebody is in this room!"

It was a woman's voice that broke in on the black silence, a quiet but sternly challenging voice, tremulous with agitation, yet strident with the triumph of conviction, and with resolute courage.

"Who is here?"

Frances Candler did not move. She stood there, breathing a little heavily, watching. For now that sudden challenge neither thrilled nor agitated her. Consciousness, in some way, refused to react. Her tired nerves had already been strained to their uttermost; nothing now could stir her dormant senses.

Then she felt the sudden patter of bare feet on the floor.

Still she waited, wondering what this movement could mean. And, as she had felt at other times, in moments of dire peril, a sense of detached and disembodied personality seized her—a feeling that the mind had slipped its sheath of the body and was standing on watch beyond and above her. She suddenly heard the sound of a key being withdrawn. It was from the door leading into the hallway. Then, almost before she realized what it meant, the bedroom door had been slammed shut, a second key had rattled and clicked decisively in its lock—and she was a prisoner!

A moment later she caught the sound of the signal-bell in the alcove.

"Central, quickly, give me the Sixty-Seventh Street police station!" It was the same clear and determined young voice that had spoken from the doorway.

There was a silence of only a few seconds. Then Frances heard the girl give her name and house number. This she had to repeat twice, apparently, to the sleepy sergeant.

"There is a burglar in this house. Send an officer here, please, at once!"

A chill douche of apprehension seemed to restore Frances to her senses. She ran across the room and groped feverishly along the wall for the electric-light button. She could find none. But on the chiffonier was a drop-globe, and with one quick turn of the wrist the room was flooded with tinted light.

The prisoner first verified her fears; there was no possible avenue of escape by way of the windows. These, she saw at once, were out of the question.

So she stopped in front of the mirror, thinking quickly and lucidly; and for the second time that night she decided to let down her hair. She could twist the bank-notes up into a little rope, and pin her thick braids closely over them, and no one might think to search for them there. It was a slender thread, but on that thread still hung her only hope.

She tore open her dress and flung the cover from the precious glove-box, scattering the gloves about in her feverish search.

The box held nothing. The money was not there. It had been taken and hidden elswhere. And she might never have known, until it was too late!

Then methodically and more coolly she made a second search throughout the now lighted room. But

nowhere could she find the package she needed. And, after all it *was* too late! And in a sort of tidal wave of deluging apprehension, she suddenly understood what life from that hour forward was worth to her.

She set to work to rearrange the chiffonier, inappositely and vacuously. She even did what she could to put the room once more in order. This accomplished, she took up her hot-water bottle, and still told herself that she must not give up. Then she seated herself in a little white-and-gold rocker, and waited, quietly blazing out through her jungle of danger each different narrow avenue of expediency.

"Poor Jim!" she murmured, under her breath, with one dry sob.

The hum of voices came to her from the hallway—the servants, obviously, had been awakened. She could hear the footsteps come to a stop without, and the shuffling of slippered feet on the hardwood floor. Then came the drone of excited whisperings, the creak and jar of the doors opening and closing.

Then, remote and muffled and far-away, sounded the sharp ringing of a bell. Somebody out in the hallway gasped a relieved, "Thank heaven!"

Frances looked at herself in the mirror, adjusting her hair, and taking note of the two little circles of scarlet that had deepened and spread across her feverish cheeks.

Then she sat down once more, and swung the hot-water bottle from her forefinger, and waited.

She heard the dull thud of the front door closing and a moment later the sound of quick footsteps on the stairs.

She looked about the comfortable, rose-tinted room, with its gilded Louis clock, with its womanish signs and tokens, with its nest-like warmth and softness; she looked about her slowly and comprehensively, as though she had been taking her last view of life.

Then she rose and went to the door, for the police had arrived.

CHAPTER XIX

DURKIN was both puzzled and apprehensive. That a taxi should follow his own at eleven o'clock at night, for some twenty-odd blocks, was a singular enough coincidence. That it should stop when he stopped, that it should wait, not a square away, for him to come out of his *café*, and then shadow him home for another thirteen circuitous blocks, was more than a coincidence. It was a signal for the utmost discretion.

It was not that Durkin, at this stage of the kaleidoscopic game, was given to wasting tissue in unnecessary worry. But there had been that mysterious cigar-light in the hallway. When he had glanced cautiously down through the darkness, leaning well out over the bannister, he had distinctly seen the little glow of light. Yet, with the exception of his own top-floor rooms, the building was given over to business offices, and by night he had invariably found the corridors empty and unused. No Holmes watchman, no patrolman, not even a Central Office man, he knew, indulged in fragrant Carolina Perfectos when covering his beat.

But when he descended quietly to reconnoitre, he saw that no one went down to the street door. And

no one, he could see equally well, remained on the stairs or in the halls, for he turned on the light, floor by floor, as he went back to his rooms.

Yet nobody, again, intelligently trying to secrete himself, would thus flaunt a lighted cigar in the darkness. From the suave and mellow odor of that cigar, too, Durkin knew that the intruder was something more than the ordinary house-thief and night-hawk.

As he thought the matter over, comfortably lounging back in a big arm-chair up in his rooms, he tried to force himself to the pacifying conclusion that the whole affair was fortuitous. He would keep a weather-eye open for such casual occurrences, in the future; but he now had no time to bother with the drifting shadows of uncertainty. He had already that day faced more material dangers; there were more substantial perils, he knew, rising up about him.

He flung himself back, with a sigh, after looking at his watch, and through the upward-threading drifts of his cigar smoke he wondered, half-reprovingly, what was taking place in the house not two hundred yards away from him, where Frances was so wakefully watching and working, while he sat there, idly waiting—since waiting, for once, was to be part of the game.

He afterward decided that in his sheer weariness of body and mind he must have dozed off into a light sleep.

It was past midnight when he awoke with a start, a vague sense of impending evil heavy upon him.

His first thought, on awakening, was that some one had knocked. He glanced at his watch, as he sprang to open the door. It was on the point of one.

Frank should have been back an hour ago. Then he *had* fallen asleep, of a certainty, he decided, with electric rapidity of thought.

But this was she, come at last, he conjectured. Yet, with that sense of impending danger still over him, he stepped back and turned off the lights. Then he quietly and cautiously opened the door.

No one was there. He peered quickly down through the gloom of the hallways, but still neither sound nor movement greeted him.

His now distraught mind quickly ran the gamut of possibilities. A baffling, indeterminate impression seized him that somebody, somewhere, was reaching out to him through the midnight silence, trying to come in touch with him and speak to him.

He looked at the motionless clapper of his transmitter signal-bell, where he had discreetly muffled the little gong with a linen handkerchief. It could not have been the telephone.

Yet he caught up the receiver with a gesture of half-angered impatience.

". . . in this house—send an officer at once!" were the words that sped along the wire to his listening ear. An officer at once! Six quick strokes of conjecture seemed to form the missing link to his chain of thought.

"My God!" he exclaimed in terror, "that means Frank!"

There had been a hitch somewhere, and in some way. And that was the Van Schaicks telephoning for the police—yes, decided Durkin, struggling to keep his clearness of head, it would be first to the Sixty-Seventh Street station that they would send for help.

He had already learned, or striven to learn, at such work, not only to think and to act, but to essay his second step of thinking while he accomplished his first in action.

He rummaged through a suit-case filled with lineman's tools, and snatched up a nickel badge similar to that worn by inspectors of the Consolidated Gas Company. It was taking odds, in one way, such as he had never before in his career dared to take. But the case, he felt, was desperate.

Once off the Avenue he ran the greater part of the way round the block, for he knew that in five minutes, at the outside, the police themselves would be on the scene. And as he ran he let his alert imagination play along the difficulties that walled him in, feeling, in ever-shifting fancy, for the line of least resistance.

He mounted the brownstone steps three at a time, and tore at the old-fashioned bell. He pushed his way authoritatively up through a cluster of servants, shivering and chattering and whispering along the hall.

At a young woman in a crimson quilted dressing-

gown, faced with baby-blue silk, he flashed his foolish little metal shield. She was a resolute-browed, well-poised girl, looking strangely boyish with her tumbled hair thrown loosely to one side.

"I'm the plain-clothes man, the detective from the police station!"

He looked at her abstractedly, and curtly shifted his revolver from his hip-pocket to his side-pocket. This caused a stir among the servants.

"Get those people out of here!" he ordered.

The resolute-browed young woman in the dressing-gown scattered them with a movement of the hand, and slipped a key into his fingers. Then she pointed to a doorway.

"This thing was half expected, ma'm, at Headquarters," said Durkin hurriedly, as he fitted the key. "It's a woman, isn't it?"

The girl with the resolute brow and the tumbled hair could not say.

"But I think I understand," she went on hurriedly. "I had quite a large sum of money, several thousand dollars, in my room here!"

Durkin, who had stooped to unlock the door, turned on her quickly.

"And it's still in this room?" he demanded.

"No; it worried me too much. I was going to keep it, but I took it down to the bank, this afternoon."

Then the girl said "Sir!" wonderingly; for Durkin had emitted a quick mutter of anger. They were

doubly defeated. By this time the bedroom door was open.

"Ah, I thought it would be a woman," he went on coolly, as he glanced at Frank's staring and wide eyes. "And, if I mistake not, Miss Van Schaick, this is Number 17358, at the Central Office."

Frances knew his chortle was one of hysteria, but still she looked and wondered. Once more Durkin flashed his badge as he took her firmly by one shaking wrist.

"Come with me," he said, with quiet authority, and step by step he led her out into the hallway.

"Not a word!" he mumbled, under his breath, as he saw her parted lips essay to speak.

"It's really too bad!" broke in the girl in the dressing-gown, half-relentingly, with an effort to see the prisoner's now discreetly downcast face.

"You won't say so, later," retorted Durkin, toying to the full with the ironic situation. "An old offender!" Even the bibulous butler, in the doorway, shook his head knowingly at this, thereby intimating, as he later explained, with certain reservations, to the second maid, that he all along knew as much.

Durkin pushed the gaping servants authoritatively aside.

"Have these people watch the back of the house—every window and door, till the Inspector and his men come up. I'll rap for the patrol from the front."

Durkin waited for neither reply nor questions, but

hurried his charge down the stairway, across the wide hall, and out through the heavy front doors.

The audacity, the keen irony, the absurdity of it all, seemed to make him light-headed, for he broke into a raucous laugh as he stood with her in the cool and free night air.

But once down on the sidewalk he caught her shaking hand in his, and ran with her, ran desperately and madly, until the rattle and clatter of a bell broke on his ear. It was a patrol-wagon rumbling round from the Avenue on the east. He would have turned back, but at the curb in front of the Van Schaick mansion already a patrolman stood, rapping for assistance.

In his dilemma Durkin dropped breathlessly down an area stairs, feeling the limp weight of the woman on his body as he fell. To Frances herself it seemed like the effortless fall in a nightmare; she could remember neither how nor when it ended, only she had the sensation of being pulled sharply across cold flagstones. Durkin had dragged her in under the shadow of the heavy brownstone steps, behind a galvanized iron garbage can, hoping against hope that he had not been noticed, and silently praying that if indeed the end was to come it might not come in a setting so sordid and mean and small.

A street cat, lean and gaunt and hungry-looking, slunk like a shadow down the area-steps. The eyes of the two fugitives watched it intently. As it slunk

and crept from shadow to shadow it suddenly became, to the worn and depressed Durkin, a symbol of his own career, a homeless and migratory Hunger, outlawed, pursued, unresting, a ravenous and unappeased purloiner of a great city's scraps and tatters.

The soft pressure of Frank's arm on his own drove the passing thought from his mind. And they sat together on the stone slabs, silently, hand in hand, till the patrol-wagon rattled past once more, and the street noises died down, and hastily opened windows were closed, and footsteps no longer passed along the street above them.

Then they ventured cautiously out, and, waiting their chance, sauntered decorously toward the corner. There they boarded a passing car, bound southward and crowded to the doors with the members of a German musical club, who sang loudly and boisterously as they went.

It seemed the most celestial of music to Durkin, as he hung on a strap in their midst, with Frank's warm body hemmed in close to him, and the precious weight of it clinging and swaying there from his arm.

Suddenly he looked down at her.

"Where are you going tonight?" he asked.

Their eyes met. The tide of abandonment that had threatened to engulf him slowly subsided, as he read the quiet pain in her gaze.

"I am going back to the Ralston," she said, with resolute simplicity.

"But, good heaven, think of the risk!" he still half-heartedly pleaded. "It's dangerous, now!"

"My beloved own," she said, with her habitual slow little head shake, and with a quietness of tone that carried a tacit reproof with it, "life has far worse dangers than the Ralston!"

She had felt unconditionally, completely drawn toward him a moment before, while still warm with her unuttered gratitude. As she thought of the indignity and the danger from which he had carried her she had almost burned with the passion for some fit compensation, without any consideration of self. Now, in her weariness of body and nerve, he had unconsciously unmasked her own potential weakness to herself, and she felt repelled from him, besieged and menaced by him, the kindest and yet the most cruel of all her enemies.

CHAPTER XX

AS SHE slowly wakened in response to the call that had been left at the hotel office, Frances wondered, with the irrelevancy of the mental machinery's first slow movements, if Durkin, at that precise moment, was still sleeping in his own bed and room in his own distant part of the city. For his awakening, she felt, would be sure to be a gray and disheartening one. It would be then, and then only, that the true meaning of their defeat would come home to him. She wondered, too, if he was looking to her, waiting for her to help him face the old-time, dreaded monotony of inactive and purposeless life.

"Oh, poor Jim!" she murmured again, under her breath.

She hoped, as she waked more fully to her world of realities, that he at least was still sleeping, that he at any rate was securing his essential rest of nerve and body,—for some heavy dregs of her own utter weariness of the previous night still weighed down her spirits and ached in her limbs.

She had always boasted that she could sleep like a child. "I make a rampart of my two pillows, and no

worries ever get over it!" Yet she now felt, as she waited for a lingering last minute or two in her warm bed, that, if fortune allowed it, she could lie there forever, and still be unsatisfied, and cry for one hour more.

But she had already made her rigorous plans for the day, and time, she knew, was precious. After her bath she at once ordered up an ample breakfast of fruit and eggs and coffee and devilled mutton chops—remembering, as she religiously devoured her meat, that Durkin had always declared she was carnivorous, protesting that he could tell it by those solid, white, English teeth of hers.

Then she dressed herself simply, in a white shirtwaist and a black broadcloth skirt, with a black-feathered turban-hat draped with a heavy traveling veil. This simple toilet, however, she made with infinite care, pausing only long enough to tell herself that today, as never before, appearances were to count with her. Yet beyond this she brushed every thought away from her. She kept determinedly preoccupied, moving feverishly about the room, allowing space for no meditative interludes, permitting herself never to think of the day and what it was to hold for her.

Then she hurried from her room, and down into the street, and into a taxi, and through the clear, cool, wintry sunlight drove straight to the Guilford, an apartment hotel, where Sunset Bryan, the race-track plunger, made his home when in New York.

The Guilford was one of those ultra-ornamented, over-upholstered, gaudily-vulgar upper Broadway hotels, replete with marble and onyx, with plate glass and gilt and outward imperturbability, where a veneer of administrative ceremonial covered the decay and sogginess of affluent license. It was here, Frances only too well knew, that Little Myers, the jockey, held forth in state; it was here that an unsavory actress or two made her home; that Upton Banaster, the turfman, held rooms; that Penfield himself had once lived; it was here that the "big-ring" bookmakers, and the more sinister and successful rail-birds and sheet-writers and touts foregathered; it was here that the initiated sought and found the court of the most gentlemanly blacklegs in all New York.

All this she knew, and had known beforehand; but the full purport of it came home to her only as she descended from her taxi-cab, and passed up the wide step that led into the sickeningly resplendent lobby.

Then, for the second time in her career, she did a remarkable and an unexpected thing.

For one moment she stood there, motionless, unconscious of the tides of life that swept in and out on either side of her. She stood there, like an Alpine traveller on his fragile little mountain bridge of pendulous pine and rope, gazing down into the sudden and awful abysses beside her, which seemed to open up out of the very stone and marble that hemmed her in. For at one breath all the shrouded panoramic illusions

of life seemed to have melted before her eyes. It left her gaping and panting into what seemed the mouth of Hell itself. It deluged her with one implacable desire, with one unreasoning, childlike passion to escape, if only for the moment, that path which some day, she knew, she must yet traverse. But escape she must, until some newer strength could come to her.

She clenched and unclenched her two hands, slowly. Then she as slowly turned, where she stood, re-entered her taxi-cab, and drove back to her own rooms once more. There she locked and bolted her door, flung from her hat and gloves and veil, and fell to pacing her room, staring-eyed and rigid.

She could not do it! Her heart had failed her. Before that final test she had succumbed, ignominiously and absolutely. For in one moment of reverie, as she faced that hostelry of all modern life's unloveliness, her own future existence lay before her eyes, as in a painted picture, from day to day and year to year. It had been branded on her consciousness as vividly as had that picture of a far different life, which had come to her behind the ivy-covered walls of her uncle's parsonage. It was a continuous today of evil, an endless tomorrow of irresolution. Day by day she was becoming more firmly linked to that ignoble and improvident class who fed on the very offal of social activity. She was becoming more and more a mere drifting derelict upon the muddy waters of the lower life, mindless and soulless and purposeless. No; not

altogether mindless, she corrected herself, for with her deeper spiritual degradation, she felt, she was becoming more and more an introspective and self-torturing dreamer, self-deceiving and self-blighting—like a veritable starving rat, that has been forced to turn and nibble ludicrously at its own tail.

Yet why had she faltered and hesitated, at such a moment, she demanded of herself. This she could not fully answer. She was becoming enigmatic, even to herself. And already it was too late to draw back—even the tantalizing dream of withdrawal was now a mockery. For, once, she had thought that life was a single straight thread; now she knew it to be a mottled fabric in which the past is woven and bound up with the future, in which tangled tomorrows and yesterdays make up the huddled cloth. She writhed, in her agony of mind, at the thought that she had no one to whom to open her soul. This she had always shrunk from doing before Durkin (and that, she warned herself, was an ill omen) and there had been no one else to whom she could go for comradeship and consolation. Then she began making excuses for herself, feebly, at first, more passionately as she continued her preoccupied pacing of the floor. She was only one of many. Women, the most jealously guarded and the most softly shrouded women had erred. And, after all, much lay in the point of view. What was criminality from one aspect, was legitimate endeavor from another. All life, she felt, was growing more feverish,

more competitive, more neuropathic, more potentially and dynamically criminal. She was a leaf on the current of the time.

And her only redemption now, she told herself, was to continue along that course in a manner which would lend dignity, perhaps even the glorified dignity of tragedy itself, to what must otherwise be a squalid and sordid life. Since she was in the stream, she must strike out for the depths, not cringe and whimper among the shallows. By daring and adventuring, audaciously, to the uttermost, that at least could still lend a sinister radiance to her wrongdoing. That alone could make excuse for those whimpering and snivelling sensibilities which would not keep to the kennel of her heart.

Yet it was only the flesh that was weak and faltering, she argued—and in an abstracted moment she remembered how even a greater evildoer than she herself had buoyed her will to endure great trial. *"That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold,"* she repeated to herself, inspirationally, as she remembered the small medicine-flask of cognac which she carried in her toilet bag.

She hated the thought of it, and the taste of it,—but more than all she hated the future into which she dare no longer look. As she medicined her cowardice with the liquor she could not help marvelling at the seeming miracle, for, minute by minute, with each scalding small draught, her weak-heartedness ebbed away. She

knew that later there would be stern exaction for that strength, but she had her grim work to do, and beggars can not always be choosers.

Then she gathered up her veil and hat and gloves, and once more made ready for her day's enterprise. The pith-ball had passed from its period of revulsion to its period of attraction.

CHAPTER XXI

FRANCES CANDLER'S fingers trembled a little at the Guilford office desk as she took out her card and penciled beneath her name: "Representing the Morning Journal."

She knew that Sunset Bryan's success on the circuit, his midnight prodigalities, his bewildering lavishness of life, and his projected departure for New Orleans, had already brought the reporters buzzing about his apartments. Even as she lifted the blotter to dry the line she had written with such craven boldness, her eye fell on a well-thumbed card before her, bearing the inscription:

ALBERT ERIC SPAULDING

The Sunday Sun.

A moment later she had it in her white-gloved hand, with her own card discreetly hidden away, and in the most matter-of-fact of voices she was asking the busy clerk behind the desk if she could see Mr. Bryan.

"Mr. Bryan is a very late riser," he explained.

"I know that," she answered coolly, "but he's expecting me, I think."

The clerk looked at her, as he stamped the card, and he continued to look at her, studiously and yet quizzically, as a bell-boy led her back to the elevator. Sunset Bryan and the type of men he stood for, the puzzled clerk knew well enough; but this type of woman he did not know. Sunset, obviously, was branching out.

"You needn't bother to wait!" she said to the youth who had touched the electric button beside the great, high-paneled door of the apartment.

She stood there quietly until the boy had turned a corner in the hallway; then she boldly opened the door and stepped inside.

The big, many-mirrored, crimson-carpeted room was empty, but from an inner room came the clinking of chopped ice against glass and the hiss of a seltzer siphon. The race-track king was evidently about to take his morning pick-me-up. A heavy odor of stale cigar-smoke filled the place. She wondered what the next step would be.

"Hello, there, Allie, old boy!" the gambler's off-hand and surprisingly genial bass voice called out, as he heard the door close sharply behind Frances.

That must mean, thought the alert but frightened girl, that Albert Eric Spaulding and the plunger were old friends. Once more the siphon hissed and spat, and the ice clinked against the thin glass. Here was a predicament.

"Hello!" answered the woman, at last, steeling her-

self into a careless buoyancy of tone ill-suited to the fear-dilated pupils of her eyes.

She heard a muffled but startled "Good God!" echo from the inner room. A moment later the doorway was blocked by the shadow of a huge figure, and she knew that she was being peered at by a pair of small, wolfish eyes, as coldly challenging as they were audacious.

She looked nervously at her gloved hands, at the little handkerchief she was torturing between her slightly shaking fingers. Her gloves, she noticed, were stained here and there with perspiration.

If she had not already passed through her chastening ordeal with a half-drunken English butler, and if the shock of that untoward experience had not in some way benumbed and hardened her shrinking womanhood, she felt that she would have screamed aloud and then incontinently fled—in the very face of those grim and countless resolutions with which she had bolstered up a drooping courage. It flashed through her, with the lightning-like rapidity of thought at such moments, that for all her dubiously honest career she had been strangely sheltered from the coarser brutalities of life. She had always shrunk from the unclean and the unlovely. If she had not always been honest, she had at least always been honorable. Durkin, from the first, had recognized and respected this inner and better side of her beating so forlornly and so ineffectually against the bars of actuality; and it was this half-hidden fine-

ness of fibre in him, she had told herself, that had always marked him, to her, as different from other men.

But here was a man from whom she could look for no such respect, a corrupt and evil-liver whom she had already practically taunted and challenged with her own show of apparent evilness. So she still tortured her handkerchief and felt the necessity of explaining herself, for the big gambler's roving little eyes were still sizing her up, cold-bloodedly, judicially, terrifyingly.

"You're all right, little girl," he said genially, as his six feet of insolent rotundity came and towered over her. "You're all right! And a little dimple in your chin, too."

A new wave of courage seemed pumping through all of the shrinking girl's veins, of a sudden, and she looked up at her enemy unwaveringly, smiling a little. Whereupon he smilingly and admiringly pinched her ear, and insisted that she have a "John Collins" with him.

Again she felt the necessity of talking. Unless the stress of action came to save her she felt that she would faint.

"I'm a Morning Journal reporter," she began hurriedly.

"The devil you are!" he said with a note of disappointment, his wagging head still on one side, in undisguised admiration.

"Yes, I'm from the Journal," she began.

"Then how did you get this card?"

"That's a mistake in the office—the clerk must have sent you the wrong one," she answered glibly.

"Come off! Come off! You good-looking women are all after me!" and he pinched her ear again.

"I'm a Morning Journal reporter," she found herself rattling on, as she stood there quaking in mysterious fear of him, "and we're going to run a story about you being the Monte Cristo of modern circuit-followers, and all that sort of thing. Then we want to know if it was true that you copped one hundred and sixty thousands dollars on Africander at Saratoga, and if you would let our photographer get some nice pictures of your rooms here, and a good one of yourself—oh, yes, you would take a splendid picture. And then I wanted to know if it is true that your system is to get two horses that figure up as if they each had a good square chance and then play the longer of the two and put enough on the other for a place to cover your losses if the first one should lose. And our sporting editor has said that you make that a habit, and that often enough you are able to cash on both, and that you—"

"Say, look here, little girl, what in the devil are you driving at, anyway?"

"I'm a reporter on the Morning Journal," she reiterated, vacuously, foolishly, passing her hand across her forehead with a weak little gesture of bewilderment. She could feel her courage withering away. Alcohol, she was learning, was an ally of untimely retreats.

"Well, it's a shame for a girl like you to get afraid of me this way! Hold on, now, don't butt in! It's not square to use a mouth like that for talking—I'd rather see it laughing, any day. So just cool down and tell me, honest and out-and-out, what it is you're after."

She flung herself forward and hung on him, in a quite unlooked for paroxysm of hysteria, apparently reckless of the moment and the menace.

"It's this," she sobbed in a sudden mental obsession, the tears of actual anguish running down her face. "It's this," she went on shrilly, hurriedly. *"I've put my money on the Duke of Kendall today—and if he doesn't come in, I'm going to kill myself!"*

Sunset Bryan let his arm drop from her shoulder in astonishment. Then he stepped back a few paces, studying her face as she mopped it with her moistened handkerchief. She would never drink brandy again, was the idle and inconsequential thought that sped through her unstable mind. For it was not she herself that was speaking and acting; it was, she felt, some irresponsible and newly unleashed spirit within her.

"Why'd you do it?" he demanded.

"Because—because Clara—that's Clara Shirley, his rider's sister—told me the Duke of Kendall was fixed to win on a long shot this afternoon!"

"Now, look here—are you, or are you not, a newspaper woman?"

"No, I'm not," she shrilled out. "I lied, just to get in to see you!"

"And you've put your money on this Duke of Kendall?"

"Every cent I own—every cent! If I lose it—oh—It will kill me to lose it!"

"But what the devil did you come here for?"

"Because I am desperate! I've— I've—"

"Now, don't spoil those lovely eyes by crying this way, honey-girl! What would I get if I told you something about that race this afternoon?"

"Oh, I'd give you anything!" she cried, almost drunkenly, snatching some belated hope from the change in his tone.

"Do you mean that?" he demanded suddenly, stepping back and looking at her from under his shaggy brows.

"No—no, not that," she gasped quickly, in terror, for then, and then only, did she catch an inkling of his meaning. She felt that she had floundered into a quagmire of pollution, and that the more fiercely she struggled and fought, the more stained with its tainted waters she was destined to remain.

She was afraid to look up at the crafty, sunburnt, animal-like face before her, with its wrinkles about the heavy line of the mouth, and its minutely intersecting crow's-feet in the corners of the shrewd and squinting eyes.

She felt that the very air of life was being walled and held away from her. Still another fierce longing for escape took hold of her, and she shuddered a little

as she fought and battled against it. She seemed without the strength to speak, and could only shake her head and try not to shrink away from him.

"Still afraid of me, eh?" he asked, as he lifted her drooping head brazenly, with his forefinger under her chin. He studied her tear-stained, colorless face for a minute or two, and then he went on:

"Well, I'm not so rotten as I might be! Here's a tip for you, little girl! The Duke of Kendall *is* goin' to come in on a long shot and what's more, he's goin' to run on odds of fifty to one!"

"You're certain of it?" she gasped.

"Dead sure of it, between you and me! There's a gang down at the Rossmore'd cover this floor with gold just to know that tip!"

"Then we *can* win! It's *not* too late!" she broke out fervently, forgetting where she stood, forgetting the man before her. She was already reaching up to draw down her veil, with a glance over her shoulder at the door.

"Am I goin' to see you again?" he still wheedled.

Again their eyes met. She had to struggle desperately to keep down the inward horror of it all. And now above all things there must be no missteps.

"Yes," she murmured.

"When?" he demanded.

"I'll come back—tomorrow!"

She already had her hand on the door-handle, when he called to her sharply.

"Here, wait one minute!"

She paused, in some deadly new fear of him.

"Look here, little girl, I began to follow this business of mine when I was nineteen years old. I'm forty-three now, and in those twenty-four years I've hauled in a heap of money. Are you listening?"

"Yes," she murmured.

"And I've hauled in something besides money!"

Still she waited.

"What I haven't made by plunging I've made by poker. And I'd never have come out the long end if I didn't know a thing or two about faces. I know a bluff when I see it. Now I want to tell you something."

"Well?" she faltered.

"You're not comin' back tomorrow! You're not comin' back at all, my pink-and-white beauty! I'm tellin' you this for two reasons. One is that I don't want you to carry off the idea that you've been breakin' me all up, and the other is that I'm not so rotten bad as—well, as Bob Pinkerton would try to make me out. That's all."

"Good-bye!" murmured the humbled woman from the doorway.

"Good-bye, and good luck!" answered Sunset Bryan, in his genial bass.

CHAPTER XXII

FOR all the rest of that day Frances Candler hated herself, hated Durkin for the mean and despicable paths into which he and his plottings had forced her, hated her sordid and humiliating conquest of the gambler Bryan and his secret.

But most of all she hated what she saw was happening within herself, the insidious and yet implacable hardening and narrowing of all her nature, the accumulating of demeaning and corroding memories, the ripening of a more and more morose self-contempt into a vague yet sullen malevolence of thought and wish.

She told herself, forlornly, that she still would not let her better nature die without a struggle, for all that she had done, and for all that she had been through. What crushed and disheartened her was the conviction that this struggle once more, in the end, would prove a futile one. She was not bad, though, not all bad, like women she had known! She had always aspired and turned toward what was right and good—her spirit cried out desolately. It was not that she had gained anything through all her wrongdoing. From the first, she felt, she had been the tool

in some stronger hand; she had been only the leaf on the winds of some darker destiny. At first it had been to live, and nothing more. Now it was to love —only some day to love as she had always hoped to do; not at once to win the crown, but some day to hope to be able to win that crown. For this she was surrendering her womanhood, her integrity of soul, even the last shred of her tattered self-respect.

She would not die in a day, she told herself again, desperately. She would not surrender everything without a struggle. What remained of her scattered legions of honor, she passionately promised herself, would still be gathered together and fostered and guarded.

Above all things, she felt, she needed companionship. Durkin meant much to her—meant far too much to her, for time and time again he had only too easily shattered her card-house of good resolutions. She had blindly submerged herself for him and his efforts. It was not that she stopped to blame or reprove him; her feeling was more one of pity, of sorrow for the unstable and unreconciled nature in the fell clutch of circumstance. Yes, he meant more to her than she dare tell herself. But there were moods and moments when he proved inadequate, and to allow that sad truth to go unrecognized was more than blindness. If only she had, or could have, the friendship of a woman, —that was her oft-recurring thought,—the companionship of one warm nature quick to understand the

gropings and aspirations of another. With such a friend, she vaguely felt, things might not yet be so ill with her.

But she knew of none. There was no one, she realized, to whom she could look for help. And she tried to console herself with the bitter unction of the claim that with her the world had always been doggedly unkind and cruel, that with an Æschylean pertinacity, morbidly interpreted as peculiar to her case, fate, or destiny, or the vague forces for which those words stood, had hounded and frustrated her at every turn.

This maddening feeling of self-hate and contempt stayed with her all that day. It made stiflingly hideous and sinister, to her brooding eyes, the overfurnished woman's pool-room which had once been Penfield's own, where she counted out her money and placed her bet on the Duke of Kendall. The broken-spirited and hard-faced women who waited about the operator's wicket, the barrenness and malignity of their lives, the vainly muffled squalidness of that office of envenomed Chance, the abortive lust for gold without labor, the empty and hungry eyes that waited and watched the figure-covered blackboard, the wolf-like ears that pricked up at the report of some belated prey in the distance—it all filled Frances with a new and disheartening hatred of herself and the life into which she had drifted.

"Oh, God!" she prayed silently, yet passionately,

while the little sounder in the operator's stall clicked and sang; "Oh, God, may it turn out that this shall be the last!"

Listlessly she read the messages, as the report for the fifth Aqueduct event of the afternoon began to flash in and the announcer cried out, "They're off!" Dreamily she interpreted the snatches of information as they came in over the wire: "Scotch Heather leads, with White-Legs second!" "Scotch Heather still leading at the quarter, and Heart's Desire pressing White-Legs close." "Heart's Desire leads at the half, with the Duke of Kendall second." "White-Legs, the Duke of Kendall, and Heart's Desire bunched at the turn." "Duke of Kendall holds the rail, with Heart's Desire and White-Legs locked for second place." Then, for a minute or two, silence took possession of the little brass sounder. Then thrilled out the news: *"The Duke of Kendall wins!"*

Frances quietly waited, amid the hubbub and crowding and commotion, until the wire report had been duly verified and the full returns posted.

Then, when the little window of the paying clerk slid open for the making of settlements, she deposited her ticket, and quietly asked to have it in hundreds.

Her slip read for two hundred dollars on the Duke of Kendall at odds of fifty to one.

"I guess this shop shuts up mighty soon, on this kind of runnin'," said the paying clerk sourly, after consulting with his chief, and flinging her money

through his little wicket at her. She counted it methodically, amid the gasps and little envious murmurs of the women at her elbow, and then hurried from the room.

"Well, you ought to be happier-looking!" snarled a painted woman with solitaire diamond earrings, as Frances hurried down the half-lighted stairway to the street.

There the woman who ought to be happy signaled moodily for a taxi-cab, and drove straight to Durkin's apartments.

She flung the pile of bills at him, in a heap before his astonished eyes.

"There it is," she said, with shaking hands and quivering lips, flashing at him a look in which he could see hatred, contempt, self-disgust and infinite unhappiness.

"There it is!" she called out to him, shrilly. "There it is—all you wanted, at last, and I *hope it will make you happy!*"

She tore the veil she had dragged from her head between her two distraught hands and flung it from her, and then fell in the other's arms and wept on his shoulder like a tired child, convulsively, bitterly, hopelessly.

CHAPTER XXIII

"HELEN can not possibly sail tomorrow." This was the cipher message which flashed from Samuel Curry to his New Orleans partner, giving him hurried warning that the final movement in their cotton coup had been again postponed for at least another twenty-four hours. Frances Candler, keeping watch on the up-town wires, had caught the first inkling of this relieving news. After a passionate hour of talk and pleading from Durkin, and after twelve long hours of unbroken sleep, much of her spirit of rebelliousness had passed away, and she had unwillingly and listlessly taken up the threads of what seemed to her a sadly tangled duty once more.

But with the advent of Curry's climactic message her old, more intimate interest in the game gradually awoke. By daylight she had sent word down to Durkin, who, about that time, was having quite trouble enough of his own.

For his underground guerrilla work, as it was called, had its risks in even the remoter parts of the city. But here, in the Wall Street district, by day the most carefully guarded area of all New York, just as by night the Tenderloin is the most watched—here, with hun-

dreds hourly passing to and fro and Central Office men buzzing back and forth, Durkin knew there were unusual perils, and need for unusual care.

Yet early that morning, under the very eyes of a patrolman, he had casually and hummingly entered the Postal-Union conduit, by way of the manhole not sixty yards from Broadway itself. In his hands he carried his instruments and a bag of tools, and he nodded with businesslike geniality as the patrolman stepped over toward him.

"Got a guard to stand over this manhole?" demanded the officer.

"Nope!" said Durkin. "Three minutes down here ought to do me!"

"You people are gettin' too dam' careless about these things," rebuked the officer. "It's *me* gets the blame, o' course, when a horse sticks his foot in there!"

"Oh, cover the hole, then!" retorted Durkin genially, as he let himself down.

Once safely in the covered gloom of the conduit, he turned on his light and studied a hurriedly made chart of the subway wire-disposition. The leased Curry wires, he very well knew, were already in active service; and the task before him was not unlike the difficult and dangerous operation of a surgeon. Having located and cut open his cables, and in so doing exposed the busy arteries of most of Wall Street's brokerage business, he carefully adjusted his rheostat,

throwing the resistant coils into circuit one by one as he turned the graduated pointer. It was essential that he should remain on a higher resistance than the circuit into which he was cutting; in other words, he must not bleed his patient too much, for either a heavy leakage or an accidental short-circuiting, he knew, would lead to suspicion and an examination, if not a prompt "throwing it into the quad," or the reversal to the protection of some distant and indirect wire.

When his current had been nicely adjusted and his sensitive little polarized relay had broken into a fit of busy and animated chattering, he turned his attention to the unused and rusted end of gas-pipe which careless workmen, months, or even years, before, had hurriedly capped and left protruding a good quarter-inch into the conduit. On this cap he adjusted a pair of pocket pipe-tongs. It took all his weight to start the rusted pipe-head, but once loosened, it was only a minute's work to unscrew the bit of metal and expose the waiting ends of the wires which he had already worked through from the basement end of the pipe. He then proceeded with great deliberation and caution to make his final connections, taking infinite care to cover his footsteps as he went, concealing his wire where possible, and leaving, wherever available, no slightest trace of interference.

When everything was completed, it was nothing more than an incision made by a skilled and artful surgeon, a surgeon who had as artfully dressed the

wound, and had left only a slender drainage tube to show how deep the cutting had been.

Durkin then repacked his tools in his spacious double-handled club bag of black sea-lion, put out his light, emerged whistling and dirt-soiled from his manhole, and having rounded the block, slipped into his basement printing-office and changed his clothes.

What most impressed and amazed Durkin, when once his quadruplex had been adjusted and pressed into service, was the absolute precision and thoroughness with which the Curry line of action had been prearranged. It was as diffusedly spectacular as some great international campaign. This Machiavellian operator's private wires were humming with messages, deputies throughout the country were standing at his beck and call, emissaries and underlings were waiting to snatch up the crumbs which fell from his overloaded board, his corps of clerks were toiling away as feverishly as ever, Chicago and St. Louis and Memphis and New Orleans were being thrown into a fever of excitement and foreboding, fortunes were being wrested away in Liverpool, the Lancaster mills were shutting down, and still cotton was going up, up, point by point; timid clerks and messenger boys and widows, even, were pouring their pennies and dollars into the narrowing trench which separated them from twenty cent cotton and fortune.

Yet only two men knew and understood just how this Napoleon of commerce was to abandon and leave

to its own blind fate this great, uncomprehending, maddened army of followers. Speculators who had made their first money in following at his heels were putting not only their winnings, but all their original capital, and often that of others, on the "long" side of the great bull movement, waiting, always waiting, for that ever alluring Fata Morgana of twenty cent cotton. Even warier spirits, suburban toilers, sober-minded mechanics, humble store-traders, who had long regarded 'Change as a very Golgotha of extortion and disaster, had been tainted with the mysterious psychologic infection, which had raced from city to town and from town to hamlet. Men bowed before a new faith and a new creed, and that faith and creed lay compactly in three pregnant words: Twenty Cent Cotton.

Yet this magnetic and spectacular bull leader, Durkin felt, was infinitely wiser and craftier than any of those he led. Curry, at heart, knew and saw the utter hopelessness of his cause; he realized that he was only toying and trifling with a great current that in the end, when its moment came, would sweep him and his followers away like so many chips. He faced and foresaw this calamity, and out of the calamity which no touch of romanticism in his nature veiled to his eyes, he quietly prepared to reap his harvest.

As these thoughts ran through Durkin's busy mind, some vague idea of the power which reposed in his own knowledge of how great the current was to be-

come, and just what turn it was to take, once more awakened in him. He had none of that romantic taint, he prided himself, which somewhere or at some time invariably confused the judgment of the gambler and the habitual criminal—for they, after all, he often felt, were in one way essentially poets in spirit, though dreamers grown sour through stagnation. Yet he could see, in the present case, how gigantic his opportunities were. Properly equipped, with a very meagre sum, millions lay before him, inevitably. But the stain of illegitimacy clung to his methods, and as it was, his returns at best could be only a paltry few thousands—fifty or sixty or even a hundred thousand at most. With Curry it would be millions.

Durkin remembered his frugal train-despatching days at the barren little wooden station at Komoka Junction, where forty dollars a month had seemed a fortune to him. He lighted a Carolina Perfecto, and inhaled it slowly and deliberately, demanding to know why he ought not to be satisfied with himself. In those earlier days he used to eat his dinner out of a tin pail, carried each morning from his bald and squalid boarding-house. Today, he remembered, he was to take luncheon with Frances at the Casa Napoleon, with its exquisite Franco-Spanish cookery, its tubbed palms, and its general air of exotic well-being.

His luncheon with Frances, however, was not what he had looked for. He met her in front of the West Ninth Street restaurant as she was stepping out of

her taxi-cab. She seemed unusually pale and worried, though an honestly happy smile flitted across her lightly veiled face as she caught sight of him.

In a moment again her manner changed.

"We are being watched," she said, in a low voice.

"Watched! By whom?"

Their eyes met and he could see the alarm that had taken possession of her.

"By MacNutt!"

Durkin grew a little paler as he looked down at her.

"He has shadowed us for two days," she went on in her tense, low, quick tones. "He followed me out of our own building, and I got away from him only by leaving my taxi and slipping through a department store."

"Did he speak to you?"

"No, not a word. I don't even think he dreams I have seen him. But it is hard to say how much he has found out. Oh, Jim, he's slow and sly and cunning, and he won't strike until the last minute. But when he does, he will try to—to smash us both!"

"I'll kill that man as sure as I'm standing on this curbstone, if he ever butts in on this game of ours! This isn't pool-room piking we're at now, Frank—this is big and dangerous business!"

He had remembered the cigar-light in the dark passageway, and the mysterious disappearance, then later the taxi-cab that had strangely followed his own.

"No, no, Jim; you mustn't say that!" she was murmuring to him, with a little shiver. "I'm afraid of him!"

"Well, *I'm* not," said Durkin, and he swore softly and wickedly, as he repeated his threat. "What does *he* want to come into our lives for, now? He's over and done with, long ago!"

"We are never over and done with anything we have been," she almost sobbed, half tragically.

Durkin looked at her, a little impatient, and also a little puzzled.

"Frank, what is this man MacNutt to you?"

She was silent.

"What has he ever been to you, then?"

"He is a cruel and cunning and bitterly vindictive man," she said, evading the question. "And if he determined to crush a person, he would do it, although it took him twenty years."

"Then I certainly *will* kill him!" declared Durkin, shaken with a sudden unreasoning sweep of white passion.

It was not until he had half finished his luncheon that his steadiness of nerve came back to him. Here he had been shadowing the shadower, step by step and move by move, and all along, even in those moments when he had taken such delight in covertly and unsuspectingly watching his quarry, a second shadow had been secretly and cunningly stalking his own steps!

"It will be a fight to the finish, whatever happens!" he declared belligerently, still harping on the string of his new unhappiness.

CHAPTER XXIV

DURKIN, bending restlessly over his relay, and dreamily cogitating on the newly discovered fact that Morse was a language as harmonious and mysterious and subtly expressive as music itself, sat up with a sudden galvanic jerk of the body.

"Helen sails at one tomorrow!" thrilled and warbled and sang the little machine of dots and dashes; and the listening operator knew that his time had come. He caught up the wires that ran through the gas-pipe to the conduit, and bracing himself against the basement wall, pulled with all his strength. They parted suddenly, somewhere near the cables, and sent him sprawling noisily over the floor.

He hurriedly picked himself up, flung every tool and instrument that remained in the dingy basement into his capacious club bag, and carefully coiled and wrapped every foot of tell-tale wire. As little evidence as possible, he decided, should remain behind him.

Five minutes later he stepped into Robinson & Little's brokerage offices. It was, in fact, just as the senior member of the firm was slipping off his light covert-cloth overcoat and making ready for a feverish day's business.

Ezra Robinson stared a little hard when Durkin told him that he had thirteen thousand dollars to throw into "short" cotton that morning, and asked on what margin he would be able to do business.

"Well," answered the broker, with his curt laugh, "it's only on the buying side that we're demanding five dollars a bale *this* morning!"

He looked at Durkin sharply. "You're on the wrong side of the market, young man!" he warned him.

"Perhaps," said Durkin easily. "But, I'm superstitious!"

The man of business eyed him almost impatiently.

Durkin laughed good-naturedly.

"I mean I had a sort of Joseph's dream that cotton was going to break down to sixteen today!"

"Well, you can't afford to work on dreams. Cotton goes up to nineteen today, and stays there. Candidly, I'd advise you to keep off the bear side—for a month or two, anyway!"

But Durkin was not open to dissuasion.

"When May drops down to sixteen or so I'll be ready to let the 'shorts' start to cover!" he argued mildly, as he placed his money, gave his instructions, and carried away his all-important little slip of paper.

Then he hurried out, and dodged and twisted and ran through those crowded and sunless cañons of business where only a narrow strip of earth's high-arching sky showed overhead. As he turned from William Street into Hanover Square, through the second tier of

half-opened plate glass windows he could already hear the dull roar of the Cotton Pit. The grim day's business, he knew, was already under way.

Four policemen guarded the elevators leading to the spectator's gallery. The place was crowded to the doors; no more were to be admitted. Durkin, however, pushed resolutely through the staggering mass, and elbowed and twisted his way slowly up the stairs. Here again another row of guards confronted him. A man at his side was excitedly explaining that the Weather Bureau had just issued flood warnings, for danger line stages in the lower Black Warrior of Alabama and the Chattahoochee of Georgia. And *that* ought to hold the "bears" back, the man declared, as Durkin elbowed his way in to the guards.

"No use, mister, we can't let you in," said a perspiring officer.

He stood with his back to the closed door. At each entrance a fellow-officer stood in the same position. The receipts at Bombay, for the half-week, cried still another excited follower of the market, were only thirty-eight thousands bales.

"Hey, stand back there! Let 'em out! Here's a woman fainted!" came the cry from within, and the doors were swung wide to allow the woman to be carried through.

Durkin wedged a five-dollar bill down between the guarding policeman's fingers.

"There's your chance. For God's sake, get me in!"

The doors were already being closed, and the din within again shut off from the listening crowd in the hallway.

"Here, stand back! Gentleman's got a ticket!" and without further ado the big officer cannonaded him into the midst of the gallery mob.

Once there, Durkin edged round by the wall, squeezed himself unceremoniously out, until, at last, he came to the brass railing guarding the edge of the spectator's gallery. Then he took a deep breath, and gazed down at the sea of commotion that boiled and eddied at his feet.

It was one mad tumult of contending forces, a maelstrom of opposing currents. Seldom was there a lull in that hundred-throated delirium, where, on raised steps about a little circular brass railing, men shouted and danced and flung up their hands and raced back and forth through a swarming beehive of cotton-hunger. Some were hatless, some had thrown coats and vests open, some white as paper, and some red and perspiring; some were snowing handfuls of torn-up pad sheets over their comrades, some were penciling madly in call-books, some were feverishly handing slips to agile youths dodging in and out through the seething mass. Every now and then a loud-noted signal-bell sounded from one end of the hall, calling a messenger boy for despatches.

In the momentary little lulls of that human tempest Durkin could catch the familiar pithy staccato of tele-

graph keys cluttering and pulsating with their hurried orders and news. He could see the operators, where they sat, apathetically pounding the brass, as unmoved as the youth at the light-crowned, red-lined blackboard, who caught up the different slips handed to him and methodically chalked down the calls under the various months.

Then the tumult began afresh once more, and through it all Durkin could hear the deep, bass, bull-like chest-notes of one trader rising loud above all the others, answered from time to time by the clear, high, penetratingly insistent and challenging soprano of another.

Curry once more had cotton on the upward move. It was rumored that the ginners' report was to be a sensational one. Despatches from Southern points had shown advancing prices for spot cotton. A weak point had been found in the Government report. All unpicked cotton on the flooding Black Warrior bottoms would never reach a gin. The mills, it had been whispered about, were still buying freely, eagerly; yet already purchasers were having more difficulty in getting the commodity than when, weeks before, it had stood two hundred points lower. And still the sea of faces fought and howled and seethed, but still the price of cotton went up.

Durkin searched more carefully through that writhing mass of frenzied speculators for a glimpse of Curry himself.

He caught sight of him, at last, standing cool and collected and rosy-faced, a few paces in front of the New Orleans blackboard, at the edge of the little sea of frantic men that fought and surged and battled at his side. Spot cotton had already soared to 17.55. The wires were reporting it at eighteen cents in New Orleans. Hurry orders from Liverpool were increasing the tension.

Durkin took a second and closer look at the great bull leader. He made note of the large emerald flashing in his purple cravat, of the gaily dotted white waistcoat, in the armholes of which were jauntily caught the careless thumbs, of the black derby hat tilted a trifle down over the careless, rosy face. This was the man who was so lavishly giving away houses and jewels and automobiles. This was the man on whom men and women in all walks of life, in every state and territory of the Union, were pinning their faith for established twenty cent cotton and the balm of affluence that it would bring them! This was the man at whose whisper a hundred thousand spindles had ceased to revolve, and at whose nod, in cotton towns half a world away, a thousand families either labored or were idle, had food or went hungry.

A momentary lull came in the storm, a nervous spasm of uncertainty. It seemed only a sheer caprice, but in sixty seconds the overstrained price had fallen away again twenty points. Curry, stroking his small mustache, stepped in closer to the circular brass railing

of the Pit, and said a quiet word or two to his head-broker. His rosy face was expressionless, and he pulled languidly at his little mustache once more. But his motion had started the upward tendency again. Both May and July cotton bounded up, point by point, capriciously, unreasonably, inexorably, as though at the wafting of a magician's wand.

When the excitement seemed at its highest, when the shrill-noted chorus of sellers and buyers was shrieking its loudest, Samuel Curry went out to eat his luncheon. This was at once noticed and commented on,—for dozens of eyes, both eager and haggard, watched the leader's every move and expression.

The change that swept over the Pit was magical. The tumult subsided. The shouting men about the brass railing stopped to take breath. The sallow-faced young man who chalked prices up on the Pit-edge blackboard rested his tired fingers. Brokers sat about on little camp-stools. For the first time Durkin could catch the sound of the sustained note of the telegraph keys clicking busily away. The sunlight fell across the paper-littered floor. The crowd in the gallery grew less. The operators were joking and chatting. A messenger boy had fallen asleep on his bench. The army was waiting for the return of its leader.

Curry re-entered the Pit quietly, with a toothpick in one corner of his mouth. He stood there for a moment or two, his thumbs in his waistcoat armholes, rocking comfortably back and forth on his heels,

enigmatically and indolently watching the floor which his reappearance had first reanimated and then thrown into sudden confusion.

Durkin, in turn, watched the leader closely, breathlessly, waiting for the beginning of the end. He saw Curry suddenly throw away his toothpick and signal to a bent and pale-haired floor broker, who shot over to his leader's side, exchanged a whispered word or two with him, and then shot back to the brass railing. There he flung his hands up in the air, with fingers outthrust, and yelled like a madman:

"Buy July fifty-one! Buy July fifty-two! Buy July fifty-three—four—five! Buy July fifty-six!"

That single-throated challenge was like a match to waiting ordnance.

With arms still extended and gaunt fingers outstretched he kept it up, for one moment. Then the explosion came. Already, it seemed he had imparted his madness to the men who screamed and fought and gesticulated about him.

"Buy July sixty-three! Buy July sixty-four! Buy July sixty-five—sixty-seven—sixty-eight!"

The frenzy in the Pit increased. Up, up went July cotton to seventy, to seventy-one, even to seventy-two. In thirty years and over no such price had ever been known. Eighty-five million dollars' worth of cotton bales, on paper, were deliriously exchanging hands. But, all things must reach their end. The bow had been bent to the uttermost. The tide had flooded into its highest point.

A sudden change came over Curry. He flung up his two hands, and brought them smartly together over his jauntily tilted black derby. This done, he elbowed and pushed his way hurriedly to the ring-side. The market hung on his next breath.

"Sell twenty thousand May at sixty!"

A silence; like that which intervenes between the lightning flash and the thunder-clap, fell in the Pit.

The leader was unloading. It was rumored that five thousand bales more than the whole crop had been sold. The bubble had been overblown. There was still time to be on the safe side. And like people fighting in a fire-panic, they tore and trampled one another down, and blocked the way to their own deliverance, through the very frenzy of their passion to escape.

But the downward trend had already begun.

Everybody attempted to unload. Outside orders to follow the movement promptly poured in. What before had been unrest was soon panic, and then pandemonium. Men and youths bending over office tickers, women at quiet home telephones, plungers and "occasionals" watching bulletin-boards, miles and miles away—all took up the startled cry.

Wire-houses promptly heard of the unloading movement, of the abdication of the bull king, and a mad stream of selling orders added to the rout of the day.

Curry had started the current; he let it take its course. Through its own great volume, he knew, it could easily carry all opposition down with it. He even ostentatiously drew on his tan-colored gloves, and took

up his overcoat, as he announced, laughingly, that he was out of the market, and that he was off to Florida for a holiday.

Then a second panic—frenzied, irrational, desperate, self-destroying panic—took hold of that leaderless mob, trampling out their last hope with their own feverish feet. Curry had liquidated his entire holdings! He was going South for the winter! He was carrying out his old threat to take the bears by the neck! He had caught the pool on the eve of betraying him!

They had warned him that he would find no mercy if he did not draw in with his manipulations. He had found treachery used against him, and as he had promised, he was giving them a dose of their own medicine.

July, in the mad rush, dropped fifty points, then a ruinous one hundred more, then wilted and withered down another fifty, until it stood 173 points below its highest quotation mark. The rout was absolute and complete.

Seeing, of a sudden, that the market might even go utterly to pieces, without hope of redemption, the old-time bull leader, now with a pallor on his plump face, leaped into the Pit, and tried to hold the runaway forces within bounds.

But his voice was lost in the din and tumult. He was a mere cork on the grim tide of disaster. Even his own frantic efforts were in vain. The *coup* had been effected. The day had been won and lost!

Durkin did not wait for the gong to sound. He

hurried round to Robinson & Little's offices, racing past disheveled men as excited as himself.

Neither member of the distraught firm of Robinson & Little was to be seen. But a senior clerk, with a pale face and a wilted collar, quickly and nonchalantly counted Durkin out his money, after verifying the slip, and speaking a brief word or two with his master over the telephone.

When his brokerage commission had been deducted, Durkin was still able to claim as his own some forty-eight thousand dollars.

It had been a game, for once, worth the candle.

He walked out into the afternoon sunlight, pausing a moment at the doorway to drink in the clear wintry air of the open street. After all, it was worth while to be alive in such a world, with all its stir, with all its—

His line of thought was suddenly disrupted. A tingle of apprehension, minute but immediate, was speeding up and down his backbone.

"That's your man," a voice had said from the shadow of the doorway.

Durkin took the two stones steps as one, and, without turning, hurried on. His eyes were half-closed as he went, counting his own quick footfalls and wondering how many of them might safely be taken to mean escape.

He walked blindly, with no sense of direction, each moment demanding of himself if it meant defeat or freedom.

At the twentieth step he felt a hand catch at the slack in his coat sleeve. He jerked a startled and indignant arm forward, but the clutch was one of steel.

"I guess we want you, Jimmie Durkin," said a grim but genial and altogether commonplace voice to him over his averted shoulder.

Then Durkin turned. It was Doogan's plain-clothes man, O'Reilly. Beside him stood a second plain-clothes man showing a corner of his Detective Bureau badge.

"Well?" said Durkin, vacuously.

The men drew in closer, sandwiching him compactly between them. It was a commonplace enough movement, but it made suddenly and keenly tangible to his mind the fact that he had lost his freedom.

"For God's sake, boys, whatever it is, don't make a scene here!" cried the prisoner, passionately. "I'll go easy enough, but don't make a show of me."

"Come on, then, quick!" said the Central Office plain-clothes man, wheeling him about, and heading for the Old Slip Station.

"Quick as you like," laughed Durkin, very easily but very warily, as he calculated the time and distance between him and the sergeant's desk, and told himself a second time admonitively that he was indeed under arrest.

CHAPTER XXV

DURKIN, with an officer at either elbow, tried to think far ahead and to think fast. Yet try as he might, his desperate mind could find no crevice in the blind wall of his predicament. Nothing, at any rate, was to be lost by talking.

"What's this for, boys, anyhow?" he asked them, with sadly forced amiability.

"Different things," said Doogan's man O'Reilly, noncommittally.

"But who made the charge—who laid the complaint, I mean?"

"'Tis an old friend of yours!" chuckled O'Reilly, thinking of other things.

Durkin looked at the man studiously. "Not Robinson?"

"And who's Robinson?—better try another guess!"

"Nor the Postal-Union people?"

"And what have you been doin' to *them?*" retorted the officer, as he gnawed at the corner of his tobacco plug and tucked it away in his vest pocket again.

"They tried to soak me once, without cause," lamented Durkin, indignantly. But his hopes had risen. After all, he felt, it might be only some old, unhappy far-off thing.

"Who the devil was it, then?"

"'Twas MacNutt!" said O'Reilly, watching him. "MacNutt's turned nice and good. He's a stool-pigeon now!"

"MacNutt!" echoed Durkin, and as before, a great rage burned through him at the sound of the name.

Hope withered out of him, but he gave no sign. He wondered what, or just how much, MacNutt dare reveal, even though he did stand in with the Central Office.

It was dark a minute or two for him, as his mind still leaped and groped at the old blind wall. Then suddenly into the depths of his despair swayed and stretched a single slender thread of hope.

It was Custom House Charley's saloon so artfully disguised as a soda-bar. There the second waiter was Eddie Crawford—the same Eddie Crawford who had worked with him on the Aqueduct pool-room plot, and had been discharged with him from the Postal Union.

It seemed eons and eons ago, that poor little ill-fated plot with Eddie Crawford!

Eddie had struggled forlornly on as an inspector of saloon stock-tickers, had presided over a lunch counter, and had even polished rails and wiped glasses. But now he mixed drinks and dispensed bootlegger's gin for Custom House Charley.

If Eddie was there—

"Look here, you two," cried Durkin decisively,

coming to a full stop to gain time. "I've struck it heavy and honest this time, and, as you people put it, I've got the goods on me. I can make it worth five thousand in spot cash to each of you, just to let this thing drop while you've still got the chance!"

The Central Office man looked at O'Reilly. Durkin saw the look, and understood it. One of them, at any rate, if it came to a pinch, could be bought off. But O'Reilly was different. "Look here, you two," said Durkin, showing the fringe of his neatly banded packet of notes.

The Central Office man whistled under his breath. But O'Reilly seemed obdurate.

"Double that, young man, and then double it again, and maybe I'll talk to you," Doogan's detective said easily, as he started on again with his prisoner.

"And if I *did?*" demanded Durkin.

"Talk's cheap, young fellow! You know what they're doing to us boys, now-a-days, for neglect of duty? Well, I've got to get up against more than talk before I run that risk!"

"By heaven—I can do it, and I *will!*" said Durkin.

O'Reilly wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. The prisoner could feel the two officers interrogating each other silently behind his back.

"Step in here, then, before you're spotted with me," said Durkin. "Come in, just as though we were three friends buying a soda, and shoot me, straight off, if I make a move to break away!"

"Oh, you'll not break away!" said the man with the steel grip, confidently, still keeping his great handful of loose coat-sleeve. But he stepped inside, none the less.

Durkin's heart beat almost normally once more. There stood Eddie Crawford, leisurely peeling a lemon, with his lips pursed up in a whistle. One hungry curb-broker was taking a hurried and belated free lunch from the cheese-and-cracker end of the counter.

Durkin stared at his old friend, with a blank and forbidding face. Then he drooped one eyelid momentarily. It was only the insignificant little twitch of a minor muscle, and yet the thought occurred to him how marvellous it was, that one little quiver of an eyelid could retranslate a situation, could waken strange fires in one's blood, and countless thoughts in one's head.

"What will you have, gentlemen?" he asked, easily, briskly.

"Scotch highball!" said the officer on his right.

"Give me a gin rickey," said the officer on his left.

"A silver fizz," said Durkin, between them.

That, he knew, would take a little longer to mix. Then there came a moment of silence.

Durkin's long, thin fingers were drumming anxiously and restlessly on the polished wood.

The busy waiter, with a nervous little up-jerk of the head, gave these restlessly tapping fingers a pass-

ing glance. Something about them carried him back many months, to his operating-desk at the Postal Union. He listened again. Then he bent down over his glass, for he was mixing the silver fizz first.

It was the telegrapher's double "i" that he had heard repeated and repeated by those carelessly tapping fingers, and then a further phrase that he knew meant "attention!"

Yet he worked away, impassive, unmoved, while with his slender little sugar-spoon he signalled back his answer, on the rim of his mixing-glass.

"Get a move on, boss," said O'Reilly, impatiently.

"Sure," said the waiter, abstractedly, quite unruffled, for his ear was a little out of practice, and he wanted to make sure just what those finger-nails tapping on the mahogany meant.

And this is what he read:

"Five—hundred—dollars—spot—c a s h—f o r—a—knock—out—to—each—of—these—two!"

"Too—expensive!" answered the sugar-spoon on the tumbler, as it stirred the mixture. "I—would—have—to—migrate."

"Then—make—it—a—thousand," answered the mahogany. "I'm pinched."

"Done," said the spoon, as the silver fizz was put down on the bar. Then came the gin rickey and the highball.

"They'll—get—it—strong!" drummed the idle bartender on a faucet of his soda-fountain.

A moment later the three glasses that stood before Durkin and his guardians were taken up in three waiting hands.

"Well, here's to you," cried the prisoner, as he gulped down his drink—for that melodramatic little silence had weighed on his nerves a bit. Then he wiped his mouth, slowly and thoughtfully, and waited.

"But here's a table in the corner," he said at last, meaningly. "Suppose I count out that race money that's coming to you two?"

O'Reilly nodded, the other said "Sure!" and the three men moved over to the table, and sat down.

Durkin had never seen chloral hydrate take effect, and Eddie Crawford realized that his friend was foolishly preparing to kill time.

"Here, boss, don't you go to sleep in here," called out Eddie, for already the Central Office man was showing signs of bodily distress.

Even the gaunt and threadbare-looking curb-broker was gazing with wondering eyes at the two lolling figures. Then, having satisfied both his hunger and his curiosity, the frugal luncher hurried away.

The hand of steel dropped from Durkin's coat-sleeve.

"I'm—I'm queer!" murmured O'Reilly, brokenly, as he sagged back in his chair.

Durkin was watching the whitening faces, the quivering eyelids, the slowly stiffening limbs.

"My God, Eddie, you haven't killed them?" he cried, as he turned to hand over his fee.

Eddie laughed unconcernedly.

"They'll be dead enough, till we get out of this, anyway!" he said, already taking off his apron and drawing down a window-curtain in front of the table in the corner.

"What's that for?" demanded Durkin, nervously, as the bartender dodged round to the telephone booth.

"Why, I've got to 'phone over t' the boss t' get back here and 'tend t' his business. You don't suppose *I* can afford t' stay in this town now, with a sucker like O'Reilly after me!"

"But what can they do?" demanded Durkin, as he looked down at the collapsed figures. "Even when they come back?"

"Oh, they daren't do much bleating, and go and peach right out, seeing they were in after graft and we could show 'em up for neglect o' duty, all right, all right! But they'd just hound me, on the side, and keep after me, and make life kind o' miserable. Besides that, I always wanted to see St. Louis, anyway!"

The swing doors opened as he spoke, and Custom House Charley himself hurried in.

"I've got to climb out for a few minutes, Chink, with a friend o' mine here," said his assistant, as he pulled on his coat.

He turned back at the swing door.

"You'd better put those two jags out before they get messin' things up," he suggested easily, as he held the door for Durkin.

A moment later the two men were out in the street, swallowed up in the afternoon crowds swarming to ferries and Elevated stations, as free as the stenographers and clerks at their elbows.

Durkin wondered, as he hurried on with a glance at the passing faces, if they, too, had their underground trials and triumphs. He wondered if they, too, had explored some portion of that secret network of excitement and daring which ran like turgid sewers under the asphalted tranquillity of the open city.

There was neither sign nor token, in the faces of the citied throng that brushed past him, to show that any of life's more tumultuous emotions and movements had touched their lives. It was only as he passed a newsboy with his armful of flaring headlines, and a uniformed officer, suggestive of the motley harvest of a morning police court, that once more he fully realized how life still held its tumult and romance, though it was the order of modern existence that such things should be hidden and subterranean. It was only now and then, Durkin told himself, through some sudden little explosion in the press, or through the steaming manhole of the city magistrate's court, that these turgid and often undreamed of sewers showed themselves. . . . After all, he maintained to himself, life had not so greatly altered.

CHAPTER XXVI

DURKIN'S first feeling, incongruously enough, once he was out in the open air, was a ravenous sense of hunger. Through all that busy day his only meal had been a hasty and half-eaten breakfast.

His second thought was at once both to submerge and sustain himself in one of those Broadway basement restaurants where men perch on seats and gulp down meals over a seat-fringed counter.

Then he thought of Frances, of her anxiety, of her long waiting, and he tried to tell himself, valiantly enough, that another hour would make little difference, and that they would take their dinner in state and at their ease, at the Beaux-Arts, or at the Ritz, or perhaps even at the St. Regis.

The thought of her gave a sudden, warm glow to the gray flatness of life, born of his hunger and weariness. He pictured her, framed in the gloom of the open doorway, in answer to his knock, the slender oval of her face touched with weariness, her shadowy, brooding, violet eyes grown suddenly alert, even her two warm, woman's arms open, like a very nest, to receive and hold him, and her motherly young shoulder to shield him. He laughed to himself as he remem-

bered the time that he had described her as the victim of an "ingrowing maternal instinct"—she had always seemed so ready to nurture and guard and cherish. She was a woman, he said to himself—with a sudden, strange foreboding of he knew not what—who ought to have had children. She was one of those deeper and richer natures, he knew, who would always love Love more than she could love men.

"What is electricity?" he had asked her one quiet night, touched into wonder for the familiar miracle, as they bent together over their relay, while an operator five hundred miles away was talking through the darkness. "We live and work and make life tenser with it, and do wonders with it, but, after all, who knows what it is?"

He remembered how the great, shadowy eyes had looked into his face. "And what is love?" she had sighed. "We live and die for it, we see it work its terrible wonders; but who can ever tell us what it is?"

Durkin had forgotten both his hunger and his weariness as he mounted the stairs to his up-town apartment, where, he knew, Frances was waiting for him. He decided, in his playful reaction of mood, to take her by surprise. So he slipped his pass-key silently into the door-lock and was about to fling the door wide when the unexpected sound of voices held him motionless, with his hand still on the knob.

It was Frank herself speaking.

"Oh, Mack, don't come between him and me **now!**

It's all I've got to live for—his love! I need it—I need him!"

"The devil you do!" said a muttered growl.

"Oh, I do! I always wanted the love of an honest man."

"An honest man!" again scoffed the deep bass of the other's voice, with a short little laugh. It was MacNutt who spoke. "An honest man! Then what were you hanging round Sunset Bryan for?"

"Yes, an honest man," went on the woman's voice impetuously; "he is honest in his love for me, and that is all I care! Leave him to me, and I'll give you everything. If it's money you want, I'll get you anything—anything in reason! I can still cheat and lie and steal for you, if you like—it was you who *taught* me how to do that!"

Durkin felt that he could stand no more of it; but still he listened, spellbound, incapable of action or thought.

"I've got to have money!" agreed MacNutt quietly. "That's true enough!" Then he added insolently, "But I almost feel I'd rather have you!"

"No, no!" moaned the woman, seemingly in mingled horror and fear of him. "Only wait and I'll get you what money I have here—every cent of it! It's in my pocketbook, here, in the front room!"

Durkin could hear her short, hard breath, and the swish of her skirt as she fluttered across the bare floor into the other room. He could hear the other's easy,

half-deprecating, half-mocking laugh; and at the sound of it all the long-banked, smoldering, self-consuming fires of jealous rage that burned within him seemed to leap and burst into relieving flame. An invisible cord seemed to snap before his eyes—it might have been within his very brain, for all he knew.

"And now I kill him!" This one idea spun through his mind, the one living wheel in all the deadened machinery of consciousness.

Darting back until he felt the plaster of the narrow hallway behind him, he flung himself madly forward against the door again. He kicked with the solid flat of his boot-sole as he came, against the light pine, painted and grained to look like oak.

It crashed in like so much kindling, and a second later, white to the very lips, he was in the room, facing MacNutt.

In his hand he held his revolver. It was of blue metal, with the barrel sawed off short. It had once been carried by a Chinaman, and had figured in a Mock Duck Street feud, and had been many times in pawnshops, and had passed through many hands.

As he faced the man he was going to kill it flitted vaguely through Durkin's mind that somebody—he could not remember who—had said always to shoot for the stomach—it was the easiest, and the surest. He also remembered that his weapon had a rifled barrel, and that the long, twisting bullet would rend and tear and lacerate as it went.

"Before I kill you," he heard himself saying, and the quietness of his voice surprised even his own ears, "before I kill you, I want to know, once for all, just *what that woman is to you.*"

The other man looked vacantly down at the pistol barrel, within six inches of his own gross stomach. Then he looked at his enemy's face. A twitching nerve trembled and fluttered on one side of his temple. Only two claret-colored blotches of color remained on his otherwise ashen face.

"For the love of God, Durkin, don't be a fool!"

MacNutt's fingers were working spasmodically, and his breath began to come wheezily and heavily.

"I'm going to kill you!" repeated Durkin, in the same level monotone. *"But what is that woman to you?"*

MacNutt was desperately measuring chance and distance. There was not the shadow of escape through struggle.

"It's murder!" he gasped, certain that there was no hope.

He could see Durkin's preparatory jaw-clench.

"You—you wouldn't get mixed up in cold murder like this!" MacNutt half pleaded, hurriedly and huskily, with his eyes now on the other man's. "Why, you'd swing for it, Durkin! You'd go to the chair!"

Durkin uttered a foul name, impatiently, and closed out the picture with his shut eyelids as he thrust his right hand forward and down.

He wondered, with lightning-like rapidity of thought, if the blood would stain his hand.

Then he felt a quick bark, and a sudden great spit of pain shot through him.

The gun had exploded, he told himself dreamily, as he staggered to the wall and leaned there weakly, swaying back and forth. But why didn't MacNutt go down? he asked himself unconcernedly, as he watched with dull eyes where a jet of red blood spurted and pumped regularly from somewhere in his benumbed forearm.

Then he had a thin and far-away vision of Frances, with a smoking revolver in her hand, drifting out from the other room. He seemed to see her floating out, like a bird on the wing almost, to where his own weapon lay, and catch it up, as MacNutt or some vague shadow of him, leaped to put a heavy foot on it.

A hundred miles away, seemingly, he heard her voice in a thin and high treble telling MacNutt to go, or she would shoot him there herself, like a dog.

Succeeding this came a sense of falling, and he found something bound tightly round his arm, and a new dull and throbbing pain as this something twisted and twisted and grew still tighter on the benumbed flesh. Then he felt the weight of a body leaning on his own, where he lay there, and a hand trying to fondle his face and hair.

"Oh, Jim, Jim!" the thin and far-away voice seemed to be wailing, "oh, Jim, I had to do it! I had to—to

save you from yourself! You would have killed him. . . . You would have shot him dead. . . . And that would be the end of everything. . . . Don't you understand, my beloved own?"

Some heavy gray veil seemed to lift away, and the wounded man opened his eyes, and moved uneasily.

"It's only the arm, poor boy . . . but I know it hurts!"

"What is it?" he asked vacantly.

"It's only the arm, and not a bone broken! See, I've stopped the bleeding, and a week or two of quiet somewhere, and it'll be all better! Then—then you'll sit up and thank God for it!"

He could hear her voice more distinctly now, and could feel her hands feverishly caressing his face and hair.

"Speak to me, Jim," she pleaded, passionately. "You're all I've got—you're all that's left to me in the whole wide world!"

He opened his eyes again, and smiled at her; but it was such a wan and broken smile that a tempest of weeping swept over the woman bending above him. He could feel her hot tears scalding his face.

Then she suddenly drew herself up, rigid and tense, for the sound of heavy footsteps smote on her ear. Durkin heard them, too, in his languid and uncomprehending way; he also heard the authoritative knock that came from the hall door.

He surmised that Frank had opened the splintered

door, for in the dim sidelight of the hall he could see the flash of metal buttons on the dark blue uniform, and the outline of a patrolman's cap.

"Anything wrong up here, lady?" the officer was demanding, a little out of breath.

"Dear me, no," answered her voice in meek and plaintive alarm. Then she laughed a little.

"She is lying—lying—lying," thought the wounded man, languidly, as he lay there, bleeding in the darkened room, not twelve paces away from her, where the room was stained and blotched and pooled with blood.

"H'm! Folks downstairs said they heard a pistol-shot up here somewhere!"

"Yes, I know; that was the transom blew shut," she answered glibly. "It nearly frightened the wits out of me, too!" She opened the door wide. "But won't you come in, and make sure?"

The officer looked up at the transom, wagged his head three times sagely, glanced at the lines of the girl's figure with open and undisguised admiration, and said it wasn't worth while. Then he tried to pierce the veil that still hung from her hat and about her smiling face. Then he turned and sauntered off down the stairs, tapping the baluster with his night-stick as he went. Then Durkin tried to struggle to his feet, was stung with a second fierce stab of pain, fell back drowsily, and remembered no more.

Frances waited, pantingly, against the doorpost. She

listened there for a second or two, and then crept inside and closed the door after her.

"Thank God!" she gasped fervently, as she tore off her hat and veil once more. "Thank God!"

Then, being only a woman, and weak and hungry and tired, and tried beyond her endurance, she took three evading, half-staggering steps toward Durkin, and fell in a faint over his feet.

The door opened and closed softly; and a figure with an ashen face, blotched with claret-color, slunk into the silent room. Night had closed in by this time, so having listened for a reassuring second or two, he groped slowly across the bare floor. His trembling hand felt a woman's skirt. Exploring carefully upward, he felt her limp arm, and her face and hair.

Then he came to the figure he was in search of. He ripped open the wet and soggy coat with a deft little pull at the buttons, and thrust a great hungry hand down into the inside breast pocket. The exploring fat fingers found what they were in search of, and held the carefully banded packet up to the uncertain light of the window.

There he tested the edges of the crisp parchment of the bank-notes, and apparently satisfied, hurriedly thrust them down into his own capacious hip-pocket.

Then he crept to the broken door and listened for a minute or two. He opened it cautiously, at last, tiptoed slowly over to the stair-balustrade, and finally turned back and closed the door.

As the latch of the shattered lock fell rattling on floor a sigh quavered through the room. It wa woman's sigh, wavering and weak and freighted w weariness, but one of returning consciousness. Fo minute later, a voice was asking, plaintively emptily, "Where am I?"

CHAPTER XXVII

OFTEN, in looking back on those terrible, phantasmal days that followed, Frances Candler wondered how she had lived through them.

Certain disjointed pictures of the first night and day remained vividly in her memory; unimportant and inconsequential episodes haunted her mind, as graphic and yet as vaguely unrelated as the midday recollection of a night of broken sleep and dream.

One of these memories was the doctor's hurried question as to whether or not she could stand the sight of a little blood. A second memory was Durkin's childlike cry of anguish, as she held the bared arm over the sheet of white oilcloth, pungent-odored with its disinfectant. Still another memory was that of the rattle of the little blackened bullet on the floor as it dropped from the jaws of the surgical forceps. A more vague and yet a more pleasing memory was the thought that had come to her, when the wound had been washed and dressed and hidden away under its white bandages, and Durkin himself had been made comfortable on the narrow couch, that the worst was then over, that the damage had been repaired, and that a week or two of

quiet and careful nursing would make everything right again.

In this, however, she was sadly mistaken. She had even thought of shyly slipping away and leaving him to sleep through the night alone, until, standing over his bed, she beheld the figure that had always seemed so well-knit and self-reliant and tireless, shaking and trembling in the clutch of an approaching chill. It seemed to tear her very heartstrings, as she gave him brandy, and even flung her own coat and skirt over him, to see him lying there so impotent, so childishly afraid of solitude, so miserably craven, before this unknown enemy of bodily weakness.

As the night advanced the fever that followed on Durkin's chill increased, his thirst became unappeasable, and from the second leather couch in the back room, where she had flung herself down in utter weariness of nerve and limb, she could hear him mumbling. Toward morning she awakened suddenly, from an hour of sound sleep, and found Durkin out of bed, fighting at his bedroom mantelpiece, protesting, babblingly, that he had seen a blood-red mouse run under the grate and that at all hazard it must be got out.

She led him back to bed, and during the five days that his fever burned through him she never once gave herself up to the luxury of actual sleep. Often, during the day and night, she would fling herself down on her couch, in a condition of half-torpor, but at the least word or sound from him she was astir again.

Then, as his mind grew clearer, and he came to recognize her once more, her earlier sense of loneliness and half-helpless isolation crept away from her. She even grew to take a secret pleasure in giving him his medicine and milk and tablets, in dressing his wound, day by day, in making his pillow more comfortable, in sending the colored hall-boy out after fruit and flowers for him, and in all those duties which broke down the last paling of reserve between them.

And it was a new and unlooked for phase of Frances Candler that Durkin slowly grew to comprehend. The constraint and the quietness of everything seemed to have something akin to a spiritualizing effect on each of them, and it was not long before he waited for her coming and going with a sort of childish wistfulness. Her tenderness of speech and touch and look, her brooding thoughtfulness as she sat beside him, seemed to draw them together more closely than even their old-time most perilous moments had done.

"We're going to be decent now, aren't we, Frank?" he said, quietly and joyously one morning.

But there were times when his weakness and stagnation of life and thought gave rise to acute suffering in both of them, times when his imprisonment and his feebleness chafed and galled him. It was agony for her to see him in passionate outbursts, to be forced to stand helplessly by and behold him unmanned and weeping, sometimes when his nervous irritability was at its worst, wantonly and recklessly blaspheming at his fate.

This sinfulness of the flesh she set down to the pain which his arm might be giving him and the unrest which came of many days in bed. As he grew stronger, she told herself, he would be his old, generous-minded and manly self once more.

But Durkin gained strength very slowly. A rent-day came around, and rather than remind him of it Frances slipped out, on a rainy afternoon, and pawned her rings to get money for the payment.

It was as she was creeping shame-faced out of the pawnshop that she looked up and caught sight of a passing automobile. It was a flashing sports-model with a lemon-colored body, and in it, beside a woman with lemon-colored hair, sat MacNutt, gloved, silk-hatted and happy-looking.

At first she beheld the two with an indeterminate feeling of relief. Then a hot wave of resentment swept over her, as she watched them drive away through the fine mist. A consuming sense of the injustice of it all took possession of her, as her thoughts went back to the day of the theft, and she remembered what a little and passing thing Durkin's money would be to MacNutt, the spender, the prodigal liver, while to her and to Durkin it had meant so much! She knew, too, that he would soon be asking about it; and this brought a new misery into her life.

It was, indeed, only a day or two later that he said to her:

"Do you know, I'm glad we didn't take that girl's

money—the Van Schaick girl, I mean. It was all our own from the first!"

Frances did not answer.

"She was a decent sort of girl, really, wasn't she?" he asked again, once more looking up at her.

"I wish I had a woman like that for a friend," Frances said, at last. "Do you know, Jim, it is years and years since I have had a woman friend. Yes, yes, my beloved own, I know I have you, but that is so different."

He nodded his head sorrowfully, and stretched out his hand for hers.

"You're better than all of 'em!" he said fondly.

They were both silent for several minutes.

"We're going to be decent now, aren't we, Frank?" he went on at last, quietly, joyously.

"Yes, Jim, from now on."

"I was just thinking, this town has got to know us a little too well by this time. When we start over we'll have to migrate, I suppose." Then he smiled a little. "We ought to be thankful, Frank, they haven't got us both pinned up by the Bertillon system, down at Headquarters!"

"I'd defy Bertillon himself to find you," she laughed, "underneath that two weeks' beard."

He rubbed his hand over his stubbled chin, absent-mindedly.

"Where shall we go, when we migrate?" he asked, not unhappily.

She gazed with unseeing eyes through the window, out over the house-top.

"I know a little south of England village," she said, in her soft, flute-like contralto, "I know a little village, nestling down among green hills, a little town of gardens and ivy and walls and thatches, in a country of brooks and hawthorn hedges—a little village where the nightingales sing at night, and the skylarks sing by day, and the old men and women have rosy faces, and the girls are shy and soft-spoken—"

"But we'd die of loneliness in that sort of place, wouldn't we?"

"No, Jim, we should get more out of life than you dream. Then, in the winter, we could slip over to Paris and the Riviera, or down to Rome—it can be done cheaply, if one knows how—and before you realized it you would be used to the quiet and the change, and even learn to like it."

"Yes," he said wearily. "I've had too much of this wear-and-tear life—even though it has its thrill now and then. It's intoxicating enough, but we've both had too much of this drinking wine out of a skull. Even at the best it's feasting on a coffin-lid, isn't it?"

She was still gazing out of the window with unseeing eyes.

"And there is so much to read, and study, and learn," Durkin himself went on, more eagerly. "I might get a chance to work out my amplifier then, as I used to think I would, some day. If I could once get

that sort of relay sensitive enough, and worked out the way I feel it can be worked out, you would be able to sit in Chicago and talk right through to London!"

"But how?" she asked.

"I always wanted to get a link between the cable and the ordinary Morse recorder, and I know it can be done. Then—who knows—I might in time go Lee De Forest one better, and have my amplifier knock his old-fashioned electrolytic out of business, for good."

Then he fell to talking about wireless and transmitters and conductors, and suddenly broke into a quiet chuckle of laughter.

"I don't think I ever told you about the fun we had down in that Broadway conduit. It was after the fire in the Subway and the Postal-Union terminal rooms. A part of the conduit roof had been cleared away by the firemen. Well, while we were working down there a big Irish watering-cart driver thought he'd have some fun with us, and every time he passed up and down with his cart he'd give us a shower. It got monotonous, after the fourth time or so, and the boys began to cuss. I saw that his wagon was strung with metal from one end to the other. I also knew that water was a good enough conductor. So I just exposed a live wire of interesting voltage and waited for the water-wagon. The driver came along as bland and innocent-looking as a baby. Then he veered over and doused us, the same as ever. Then the water and the wire got together. That Irishman gave one jump—he went

five feet up in the air, and yelled—oh, how he yelled!—and ran like mad up Broadway, with a policeman after him, thinking he'd suddenly gone mad, trying to soothe him and quiet him down!"

And Durkin chuckled again, at the memory of it all. The sparrows twittered cheerily about the sun-lit window-sill. The woman did not know what line of thought he was following, but she saw him look down at his bandaged arm and then turn suddenly and say:

"What a scarred and battered-up pair we'd be, if we had to keep at this sort of business all our lives!"

Then he lay back among the pillows, and closed his eyes.

"I say, Frank," he spoke up unexpectedly, "where are you taking care of that—er—of that money?"

Her hands fell into her lap, and she looked at him steadily. Even before she spoke she could see the apprehension that leaped into his colorless face.

"No, no; we mustn't talk more about that today!" she tried to temporize.

"You don't mean," he cried, rising on his elbow, "that anything has happened to it?"

He demanded an answer, and there was no gainsaying him.

"There is no money, Jim!" she said slowly and quietly. And in as few words as she could she told him of the theft.

It was pitiable, to her, to see him, already weak and broken as he was, under the crushing weight of this

new defeat. She had hoped to save him from it, for a few more days at least. But now he knew; and he reviled MacNutt passionately and profanely, and declared that he would yet get even, and moaned that it was the end of everything, and that all their fine talk and all their plans had been knocked in the head forever, and that now they would have to crawl and slink through life living by their wits again, cheating and gambling and stealing when and where they could.

All this Frances feared and dreaded and expected; but desperately and forlornly she tried to buoy up his shattered spirits and bring back to him some hope for the future.

She told him that he could work, that they could live more humbly, as they had once done years before, when she had taught little children music and French, and he was a telegraph agent up at the lonely little Canadian junction-station of Komoka, with a boarding-house on one side of him and a mile of gravel-pit on the other.

"And if I have you, Jim, what more do I want in life?" she cried out, as she turned and left him, that he might not see the misery and the hopelessness on her own face.

"Oh, why didn't you let me kill him!" he called out passionately after her. But she did not turn back, for she hated to see him unmanned and weeping like a woman.

CHAPTER XXVIII

"SURELY this is Indian Summer—strayed or stolen!" said Frank one morning a few days later, as she wheeled Durkin and his big arm-chair into the sunlight by the open window.

His arm was healing slowly, and his strength was was equally slow in coming back to him. Yet she was not altogether unhappy during those fleeting days of work and anxiety.

Her darkest moments were those when she saw that Durkin was fretting over the loss of his ill-gained fortune, burning with his subterranean fires of hatred for MacNutt, and inwardly vowing that he would yet live to have his day.

She was still hoping that time, the healer, would in some way attend to each of his wounds, though that of the spirit, she knew, was the deeper of the two. Yet from day to day she saw that his resentment lay sourly embedded in him, like a bullet; her only hope was that what nature could neither reject nor absorb it would in due time encyst with indifference. So if she herself became a little infected with his spirit of depression, she struggled fiercely against it and showed him only the cheeriest inglenooks of her many-chambered emotions.

"See, it's almost like spring again!" she cried joyously, as she leaned over his chair and watched the morning sunlight, misty and golden on the city housetops.

The window-curtains swayed and flapped in the humid breeze; the clatter of feet on the asphalt, the rumble of wheels and the puff and whir of passing automobiles came up to them from the street below.

"It seems good to be alive!" she murmured pensively, as she slipped down on the floor and sat in the muffled sunlight, leaning against his knees. There was neither timidity nor self-consciousness in her attitude, as she sat there companionably, comfortably, with her thoughts far away.

For a long time Durkin looked down at her great tumbled crown of chestnut hair, glinting here and there with its touch of reddish gold. He could see the quiet pulse beating in the curved ivory of her throat.

She grew conscious of his eyes resting on her, in time, and turned her face solemnly up to him. He held it there, with the oval of her chin caught in the hollow of his hand.

"Frank, there's something I'm going to ask you, for the twentieth time!"

She knew what it was even before he spoke. But she did not stop him, for this new note of quiet tenderness in his voice had taken her by surprise.

"Frank, can't you—won't you marry me, now?"

She shook her head mournfully.

"Isn't it enough that I'm near you and can help you, and that we can both still go and come as we want to?"

"No, I get only the little fragments of your life, and I want all of it. If you can't do it willingly, of course, it's as silly for me to demand it as to try to nail that sunbeam down to the floor there! But tell me, has there ever been another?"

"No, never, Jim!" she cried. "There was never any one who could make me so happy—and so miserable,—who could make me so unsatisfied with myself and with my life!"

He studied her upturned face. In it he imagined he could see all the old opposition of the dual and strangely contending nature. About the shadowy eyes seemed to lurk the weariness and the rebelliousness of the inwardly pure woman who had been driven to face life in its more dubious phases, the woman who had broken laws and essayed great hazards with him. Yet about the fresh young mouth remained all the pride and virginal purity of the woman whose inward life was till virginal and pure. In this, he felt, lay the bitterest thing of all. She was still a good woman, but the memory of how, through the dark and devious ways of the career that seemed to have engulfed her, she had fought and struggled for that almost incongruous purity of mind and body, remained to him a tragic and autumnal emblem of what her unknown earlier, April-like goodness of girlish soul must have

been. He sighed as he thought of it, before he began to speak again, for it gave him the haunting impression that he had been cheated out of something; that the beauty and rapture of that Aprilian girlhood should have been his, and yet had eluded him.

"Even though there had been another," he went on quietly, "I don't believe it would count. Isn't it strange how we all beat and flutter and break our wings around a beautiful face! One face, just a little softer, one woman's eyes, just a little deeper, and one voice, a little mellower; and dear me, dear me—how this wayward mortal passion of ours throbs and beats and surges about it! One beautiful face, and it sends world-history all awry, and brings out armies and changes maps, and makes men happy or miserable, as it likes!"

"That's the first time I ever knew you were a poet!" she cried in almost a coo of pride.

His hand lay heavily on her crown of tumbled gold hair. "Won't you marry me?" he asked again, as quietly as before.

"Oh, Jim," she cried, "I'm afraid of it! I'm afraid of myself, and of you!"

"But see what we've been through together—the heights and the depths. And we never hated each other, there!"

"But there were times, I know there were times when you might have, if you were tied to me! We were each free to go and come. But it's not that,

Jim, I'm so afraid of. It's the keeping on at what we have been doing, the danger of not keeping decent, of getting our thoughts and feelings deadened, of getting our hearts macadamized. That's why I could never marry you until we are both honest once more!"

"But if I do try to get decent—I can't promise to turn angel all at once, you know!—if I *do* try to be decent, then will you marry me, and help me along?"

"I don't look for miracles,—neither of us can be all good, anyway; it's the trying to be good!"

"But we *have* tried—so often!"

"Who was it said that the Saints were only the sinners who kept on trying?"

"Wasn't there a bishop in your family?" he asked, with a quizzical little upthrust of his mouth corners.

"A bishop?" she asked, all gravity.

"There must have been a bishop, somewhere—you take to preaching so easily!"

"It's only to make it easier for you," she reproved him. Then she added drearily, "Heaven knows, I'm not self-righteous!"

"Then take me as I am, and you will be making it easier for me!"

"I could, Jim, if I thought you would begin by doing one thing."

"And that is?"

"Not try to get even with MacNutt."

She could feel the galvanic movement of uncontrol that sped down his knees.

"When that damned welcher gives me back what is mine, fair and square and honest, then he can go his way and I'll go mine—but not before!"

"But, *was* it fair and square and honest?"

"About as much so as most of the money people get —and I'm going to have it!"

"And that means going back to all the old mean, humiliating ways, to the old, degrading dodges, and the old, incessant dangers!"

"But it's ours, that money—every cent of it—it's what we've got to have to start over again with!"

"Then you will scheme and plot and fight for it? And keep on and on and on, struggling in this big quicksand of wrong-doing, until we are deeper than ever?"

"Do *you* forgive MacNutt?"

"No, I do not! I can't, for your sake. But I would rather lie and scheme and plot myself than see you do it. A woman is different—I don't know how or why it is, but in some way she has a fiercer furnace of sacrifice. If her wickedness is for another, her very love burns away all the dross of deceit and selfishness!"

"I hate to hear you talk that way, when you know you're good and true as gold, through and through. And I want you to be my wife, Frank, no matter what it costs or what it means."

"But will you make this promise?"

"It's—it's too hard on *you!* Think of the grind and the monotony and the skimping! And besides,

supposing you saw a chance to get the upper hand of MacNutt in some way, would you fold your hands and sigh meekly and let it slip past?"

"I can't promise that *I* would! But it's you I'm afraid of, and that I'm trying to guard and protect and save from yourself!"

She caught up his free hand and held it closely in her own.

"Listen," he broke in irrelevantly, "there's a hurdy-gurdy somewhere down in the street! Hear it?"

The curtains swayed in the breeze; the street sounds crept to them, muffled and far away.

"Can't you promise?" she pleaded.

"I could promise you anything, Frank," he said after a long pause. "Yes," he repeated, "I promise."

She crept closer to him, and with a little half-stifled, half-hungry cry held his face down to her own. He could feel the abandon of complete surrender in the most intimate warmth of her mouth, as it sought and clung to his own.

When her uplifted arms that had locked about his neck once more fell away, and the heavy head of dull gold sank capitulatingly down on his knee, the hurdy-gurdy had passed out of hearing, and the lintel-shadow had crept down to where they sat.

CHAPTER XXIX

ON THE following afternoon Frances Candler and Durkin were quietly married.

It was a whim of Durkin's that the ceremony should take place on Broadway, "on the old alley," as he put it, "where I've had so many ups and downs." So, his arm in a black silk sling, and she in a gown of sober black velvet, with only a bunch of violets bought from an Italian boy on a street corner, they rode together in a taxi-cab to the rectory of Grace Church.

To the silent disappointment of each of them the rector was not at home. They were told, indeed, that it would be impossible for a marriage service to be held at the church that afternoon. A little depressed, inwardly, at this first accidental cross-thread of fate, they at once made their way up Fifth Avenue to the Church of the Transfiguration.

"The way we ought to do it," said Frances, as they rode up the undulating line of the Avenue, "would be to have it all carried on over a long-distance telephone. We should have had some justice of the peace in Jersey City ring us up at a certain time, and send the words of the service over the wire. That would have been more in the picture. Then you should have

twisted up an emergency wedding ring of KK wire, and slipped it on my finger, and then cut in on a Postal Union or an Associated Press wire and announced the happy event to the world!"

She rattled bravely on in this key, for she had noticed, in the strong sidelight of the taxi-window, that he looked pale and worn and old, seeming, as he sat there at her side, only a shadow of the buoyant, resilient, old-time Durkin that she had once known.

The service was read in the chapel, by a hurried and deep-voiced English curate, who shook hands with them crisply but genially, before unceremoniously slipping off his surplice. He wished them much happiness. Then he told them that the full names would have to be signed in the register, as a report of the service must be sent to the Board of Health, and that it was customary to give the sexton and his assistant two dollars each for acting as witnesses.

Frances noticed Durkin's little wince at the obtrusion of this unlooked-for sordidness, though he glanced up and smiled at her reassuringly as he wrote in the register, "James Altman Durkin," and waited for her to sign "Frances Edith Candler."

The service, in some way, had utterly failed to impress Durkin as it ought. The empty seats of the chapel, with only one pew crowded with a little line of tittering, whispering schoolgirls, who had wandered in out of idle curiosity, the hurriedly mumbled words of the curate—he afterward confessed to them that this was his third service since luncheon—the unex-

pected briefness of the ceremony itself, the absence of those emblems and rituals which from time immemorial had been associated with marriage in his mind—these had combined to attach to the scene a teasing sense of unreality.

It was only when the words, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," were repeated that he smiled and looked down at the woman beside him. She caught his eye and laughed a little, as she turned hurriedly away, though he could see the tear-drops glistening on her eyelashes.

She held his hand fiercely in her own, as they rode from the little ivy-covered church, each wondering at the mood of ineloquence weighing down the other.

"Do you know," she said, musingly, "I feel as though I had been bought and sold, that I had been tied up and given to you, that—oh, that I had been nailed on to you with horseshoe nails! Do you feel any difference?"

"I feel as though I had been cheated out of something—it's so hard to express!—that I ought to have found another You when I turned away from the railing; that I ought to be carrying off a different You altogether—and yet—yet here you are, the same old adorable You, with not a particle of change!"

"After all, what is it? Why, Jim dear, we were married, in reality, that afternoon I opened the door to MacNutt's ring and saw you standing there looking in at me as though you had seen a ghost!"

"No, my own, we were joined together and made

one a million years ago, you and I, in some unknown star a million million miles away from this old earth, and through all those years we have only wandered and drifted about, looking for each other!"

"Silly!" she said happily, with her slow, English smile.

In the gloom of the taxi-cab, with a sudden impulsive little movement of the body, she leaned over and kissed him.

"You forgot that," she said joyously, from the pillow of his shoulder. "You forgot about that in the chapel!"

They drifted down through what seemed a shadowy and far-away city, threading their course past phantasmal carriages and spectral crowds engrossed in their foolish little ghost-like businesses of buying and selling, of coming and going.

"You're all I've got now," she murmured again, with irrelevant dolefulness.

Her head still rested on the hollow of his shoulder. His only answer was to draw the warmth and clinging weight of her body closer to him.

"And you'll have to die some day!" she wailed in sudden misery. And though he laughingly protested that she was screwing him down a little too early in the game, she reached up with her ineffectual arms and flung them passionately about him, much as she had done before, as though such momentary guardianship might shield him from both life and death itself, for all time to come.

CHAPTER XXX

FRANCES sent Durkin on alone to the Chelsea, where, he had finally agreed, they were to take rooms for a week at least. There, she argued, they could live frugally, and there they could escape from the old atmosphere, from the old memories and associations that hour by hour had seemed to grow more unlovely in her eyes.

On wisely reckless second thought, she ran into a florist's and bought an armful of roses. These she thrust up into the taxi-seat beside him, explaining that he was to scatter them about their rooms, so that he could be in the midst of them when she came. Then she stood at the curb, watching him drive off, demanding of herself whether, after all, some Indian Summer of happiness were not due to her, wondering whether she were still asking too much of life.

Then she climbed the stairs to the little top-floor apartment, saying to herself, compensatingly, that it would be for the last time. She felt glad to think that she had taken from Durkin's hands the burden of packing and shutting up the desolate and dark-memoried little place.

Yet it had taken her longer than she imagined, and she was still stooping, with oddly mixed emotions, over the crumpled nurse's dress and the little hypodermic that she carried away from the Van Schaick house, when she heard a hurried footfall on the stairs and the click of a pass-key in the lock. She realized, with a start, that it was Durkin come back for her, even after she had begged him not to.

She ran over toward the door, and then, either petulantly or for some stronger intuitive reason—she could never decide which—stopped short, and waited.

The door opened slowly. As it swung back she saw standing before her the huge figure of MacNutt.

"*You!*" she gasped, with staring eyes.

"Sure it's me!" he answered curtly, as he closed the door and locked it behind him.

"But, how dare you?" and she gasped once more. "What right have you to break in here?"

She was trembling from head to foot now, recoiling, step by step, as she saw some grim purpose written on the familiar blocked squareness of his flaccid jaw and the old glint of anger in the deep-set, predatory eyes.

"Oh, I didn't need to break in, my lady! I've been here before, more than once. So don't start doin' the heavy emotional and makin' scenes!"

"But—but Durkin *will* kill you this time, when he sees you!" she cried.

MacNutt tapped his pocket confidently.

"He'll never catch me that way twice, I guess!"

"How dare you come here?" she still gasped, bewildered.

"Oh, I dare go anywhere, after you, Frank! And I may as well tell you, that's what I came for!"

She still shivered from head to foot. It was not that she was afraid of him. It was only that, in this new beginning of life, she was afraid of some unforeseen disaster. And she knew that she would kill herself, gladly, rather than go with him.

"Now, cool down, little woman," MacNutt was saying to her in his placid guttural. "We've been through enough scrapes together to know each other, so there's no use you gettin' high-strung and nervous. And I guess you know I'm no piker, when it comes to anybody I care about. I never went back on you, Frank, even though you *did* treat me like a dog and swing in with that damned welcher Durkin, and try to bleed me for my last five hundred. I tell you, Frank, I can't get used to the thought of not havin' you 'round!"

She gave forth a little inarticulate cry of hate and abhorrence for him. She could see that he had been drinking, and that he was shattered, both in body and nerve.

"Oh, you'll get over that! I've knocked around with women—I've been makin' and spendin' money fast enough for anybody this season; but no one's just the same as you! You thought I was good enough to work with once, and I guess I ought to be good enough to travel with now!"

"That's enough!" she broke in, wrathfully. She had grown calmer by this time, and her thoughts were returning to her mind now, buzzing and rapid, like bees in a fallen hive.

"No, it's not," he retorted, with an ominous shake of the square jaw and beefy neck. "And you just wait until I finish. You've been playin' pretty fast and loose with me, Frank Candler, and I've been takin' it meek and quiet, for I knew you'd soon get tired of this two-cent piker you've been workin' the wires with!"

She opened her lips to speak, but no sound came from them.

"I tell you, Frank, you're not the sort of woman that can go half fed and half dressed, driftin' 'round dowdy and hungry and homeless, most of the time! You're too fine for all that kind o' thing. A woman like you has got to have money, and be looked after, and showed around, and let take things easy—or what's the use o' bein' a beauty, anyway! You know all that, 's well as I do!"

"Yes, I know all that!" she said vacantly, wearily, for her racing thoughts were far away. She was inwardly confessing to herself that they who live by the sword must die by the sword.

"Then what's the use o' crucifyin' yourself?" cried MacNutt, seeming to catch hope from her change of tone. "You know as well as I do that I can hound this Durkin off the face o' the globe. I can make it so

hot for him here in New York that he daren't stick his nose within a foot o' the Hudson. And I'm goin' to do it, too! I'm goin' to do it, unless you want to come and stop me from doin' it!"

"Why?" she asked emptily.

"Didn't you save my life once, Frank, right in this room? Damn it all, you must have thought a little about me, to do a thing like that!"

"And what did you do for it?" she demanded, with a sudden change of front. Once again she was all animal, artful and cunning and crafty. "You played the sneak-thief. You slunk back here and stole his money. No, no; there's no good your denying it—you came and stole his honestly earned money!"

"Honestly earned?" he scoffed.

"No, not honestly earned, perhaps, but made as clean as it could be made, in this low and mean and underhand business you taught us and dragged us into! And you came and stole it, when it meant so much to me, and to him!"

"Yes, I said I'd knock him, and I did knock him! But, good heavens, what's his money to a high-roller like me! If that's all you're swingin' your clapper about, you may as well get wise. If it's the money you're achin' after, you can have it—providin' you take it the way I'm willin' to give it to you!"

"I can't believe you—you know that!"

"You think I'm talkin' big? Well, look here. Here's my wad! Yes, look at it good and hard—there's

enough there to smother you in diamonds, and let you lord it 'round this town for the rest of your life!"

"You're drunk," she cried, once more consumed by a sudden fear of him.

"No, I'm not; but I'm crazy, if you want to put it that way, and you're the cause of it! I'm tired o' plottin' and schemin' and gettin' mixed up in all kinds o' dirty work, and I want to take it easy now, and enjoy life a little!"

She gasped at his words. Were *his* aspirations, then, quite as high as hers? Were all the vague ideals she mouthed to Durkin and herself only the thoughts of any mottled-souled evil-doer?

Then she watched him slowly close the great polished pig-skin wallet, replace it in his inside breast-pocket, and secure it there with its safety-button.

Frances gazed at him blankly, with detached and impersonal attention. He stood to her there the embodiment of what all her old life had been. In him she saw incarnate all its hideousness, all its degrading coarseness, all its hopeless vileness and wickedness. And this was what she had dreamed that at a moment's notice she could thrust behind her! She had thought that it could be slipped off, at a turn of the hand, like a soiled skirt, when the insidious poison of it had crept into her very bones, when it had corroded and withered and killed that holier something which should have remained untouched and unsullied in her inmost heart of hearts. He was her counterpart, her mate, this

gross man with the many-wrinkled, square-set jaw, with the stolid bull-neck, with his bloated, vulpine face and his subdolous green eyes. This was what she had fallen to, inch by inch, and day by day. And here he was talking to her, wisely, as to one of his kind, bargaining for her bruised and weary body, as though love and honor and womanly devotion were chattels to be bought and sold in the open market.

The ultimate, inexorable hopelessness, the foredoomed tragedy of her dwarfed and perverted life came crushingly home to her, as she looked at him, still confronting her there in his challenging comradeship of crime and his kinship of old-time dishonor.

"Mack," she said quietly, but her voice was hard and dry and colorless, "I could never marry you, now. But under one condition I would be willing to go with you, wherever you say."

"And that condition is?"

"It is that you return to Durkin every cent you owe him, and let him go his way, while we go ours."

"You mean that, Frank?"

"Yes, I mean it!"

He looked at her colorless face closely. Something in it seemed to satisfy him.

"But how am I to know you're going to stick to your bargain?" he still hesitated. "How am I to be sure you won't get your price and then give me the slip?"

"Would Durkin want me, *after that?* Would he

take up with me when *you* had finished with me? Oh, he's not that make of man!" she scoffed in her hard, dry voice. There was a little silence; then, "Is that all?" she asked in her dead voice.

"That's just as you say," he answered.

"Very well," she said between her drawn lips. She stepped quickly to the back of the room, and lifting the hidden telephone transmitter up on the table she threw open the window to loop the wire that ran by the over-hanging eave.

"Hold on, there!" cried MacNutt, in alarm. "What's all this, anyway?"

"I have got to tell Durkin, that's all. He has got to know, of course, what we have decided on."

"Oh, no, you don't, my beauty! If there's goin' to be any telephonin' out o' this house, I do it myself!"

"It makes no difference," she answered, apathetically. "You can tell him as well as I could."

She could see some new look of suspicion and rage mounting into his watchful eyes. "I do the talking this trip," he cried.

"Then cut in and loop that third wire—no, the fourth, counting the lighting wire—on the eave there. It is the Van Schaick house-wire—indeed, it would be much better to cut them off altogether, after we cut in, or there might be some interference from them with Central. Now throw open that switch behind the window-curtain there—so. Now, if you will ring up Central and ask for the Chelsea, they will connect you

directly with Durkin. He is waiting in his room there for me."

He looked at her, suspicious and puzzled, the momentary note of triumph gone out of his voice.

"See here, Frank, I may as well tell you one thing, straight out. Although I square up with Durkin for what I got out of him, and pass this money of his over to you, I tell you now, I'm going to smash that man!"

"Smash him?" she echoed, dismally. "Then you've been lying!"

"Yes, smash him! You don't imagine I'm goin' to have that piker shadowin' and doggin' me like a flatty all my days! I stand pat now with Doogan and his men. And in ten days I can have Durkin up against ten years!"

"That's a lie," she contended.

"Well, I can have him so he'll be glad to get ten years, just to get out o' what's comin' to him!"

"Then this was all a trap, a plot?" she gasped.

"No, it's not a trap—it's only that I wanted to save you out o' the mess. I'm wise enough in most things, but about you I've always been a good deal of a fool. It's my loose screw, all right; sometimes it's driven me near crazy. I'm goin' to have you, I don't care what it costs me—I don't care if I have to pound this Durkin's brains out with a lead-pipe!"

"Take me! Take me—but save him!" she pleaded.

"Good God, it's not just you I want—it's—it's your feelin's, it's your love that I've got to have!"

"Oh!" she moaned, covering her face with her hands.

"It's a queer way of makin' love, eh?—but I mean it! And I want to know if you're goin' to swing in with me and get taken care of, or not?"

"Oh, you fool, you fool!" she cried suddenly, smiting the air with her vehemently closed fists. "You poor, miserable fool! I loathe and hate the very sound of your voice! I despise every inch of your brutish, bloated body! I'd die—I'd kill myself ten times over before I'd so much as touch you!"

He looked at her gathering storm of rage, first in wonder, and then in a slow and deadly anger that blanched his face and left only the two claret-colored blotches on his withered cheeks.

"I'll give you one last chance," he said, clenching his flaccid jaw.

"Chance! I don't want a chance! Now I know how things *must* go! Now I know how to act! And before we settle it between us, and if I have to—to lose everything, I want you to know one thing. I want you to know that I'm doing it for Durkin! I'm doing it all, everything, for *him!*"

"For Durkin?" he choked, with an oath. "What are you fightin' for that washed-out welcher for?"

"Because Durkin is my husband!" she said, in her ashen white determination, as she stepped quickly to the door and double-locked it. "And because I would *die* for him"—she laughed shrilly, horribly, as she said it—"before I'd see him hurt or unhappy!"

She stood firmly with her back against the door, panting a little, her jaw fallen loosely down, her eyes luminous with their animal-like fire.

"Then, by God, you *will!*" said MacNutt in his raucous guttural, with his limbs beginning to shake as he glared at her.

She stood there motionless, trying to think out the first moves in that grim game for which freedom and love and life itself were the stakes.

"Then, by God, you will!" repeated MacNutt, with the sweat coming out in beads on his twitching temples.

CHAPTER XXXI

FRANCES Durkin knew the man she had to face. She knew the pagan and primordial malevolence of the being, the almost demoniacal passions that could sweep through him. More than once she had seen his obsessions tremble on the verge of utter madness. She had come to know the rat-like pertinacity, the morbid, dementating narrowness of mind, that made him what he was. In his artful and ruthless campaign against Penfield, in his relentless crushing of old-time confederates, in each and all of his earlier underground adventures, she had seen the sullen, bulldog, brutal contumacy of the man.

She expected nothing from him, neither mercy nor quarter. And yet, she told herself, she was in no way afraid of him. As she had felt before, time and time again, in moments of great danger, a vague sense of duality of being took possession of her, as if mind stood detached from body, to flutter and dodge through the darkness before her, freed from its sheath of flesh.

She felt that she might kill him now, if the chance came, quite easily and calmly. Yet she still diffidently half-hoped that the chance would be denied her. It was not that she would be cowardly about it, but it

seemed to her the darker and more dubious way out of it all.

No; it was *he* who must do the killing, she told herself, with a sudden pang of half-delirious abnegation.

That was the utter and ultimate solution of the tangled problem; it would be over and done with in a minute. She had lived by the sword and she could die by the sword; from that moment, too, would be counted the days of MacNutt's own doom, the release and the deliverance of Durkin!

She seemed to hug this new self-illumination to her, and a smile of scorn trembled on her lips as he stood over her, in his white and shaking wrath.

"Oh, I know you, you she-devil!" he suddenly cried out, with an animal-like snarl from the depths of his flabby throat. "I know what you're after! You think you'll do the cheap-heroine act; you think you'll end it by comin' between him and me this way! You think you'll save his puny piker's heart a last pang or two, don't you! You think you'll cheat me out of that, do you? You think that it's just between you and me now, eh, and that you can do your martyr's act here while he's off somewhere else moonin' about your eyebrows and takin' it easy!"

And he laughed horribly, quietly. "No!" he cried, with a volley of the foulest oaths; "no! If I'm goin' to get the name I'm goin' to have the game! I mean to get my money's worth out o' this! I'm goin' to kill you, you cat, but I'm goin' to do it in my own way!"

The room, which rang with his hoarse voice, seemed to grow small and dark and cell-like. The great, gorilla-like figure, in the gray light, seemed to draw back and go a long way off, and then tower over her once more.

"You're going to kill me?" she gasped, as though the thought of it had come home to her for the first time.

Her more ecstatic moment of recklessness had passed strangely away, and had left her helpless and craven.

Nothing but terror was written on her face as she cowered back from him and sidled along the wall, with her fingers groping crazily over its blind surface, as though some unlooked-for door of release might open to their touch.

"You cat! You damned cat!" he cried hoarsely, as he leaped toward her and tried to catch her by the throat. She writhed away from him and twisted and dodged and fought until she had gained the door between the front and the back room. Through this, cat-like, she shot sidewise, and swung to the door with all her strength.

It had been her intention to bolt and lock it, if possible. But he had been too quick for her. He thrust out a maddened hand to hold it back from the jamb, and she could hear his little howl of pain as the meeting timbers bit and locked on the fingers of the huge, fat hand.

As she stood there, panting, with her full weight

against the door, she could see the discoloring finger-tips, and the blood beginning to drip slowly from the bruised hand. Yet she knew she could not long withstand the shock of the weight he was flinging against her. So she looked about the darkening room quickly, desperately. Her first thought was of the windows. She could fling herself from one of them, and it would all be over with her in a minute.

Then she caught sight of the nurse's uniform of striped blue and white linen flung across the bed, and in a sudden inspirational flash she remembered the hypodermic. That, at least, would be painless—painless and sure.

She slipped away from the door, and at the next lunge of his great body MacNutt fell sprawling into the room. By the time he was on his feet she had the little hollow-needled instrument in her hand.

But he fell on her, like a terrier on a rat, caught her up, shook and crushed her in his great ape-like arms.

"Oh, I'll show you!" he panted and wheezed. "I'll show you!"

He dragged her writhing and twisting body through the door into the back room. She fought and struggled and resisted as best she could, catching at the door-posts and the furniture with her one free hand as she passed. She would have used her hypodermic and ended it all then and there, only his great grip pinned her right arm down to her side, and the needle lay useless between her fingers.

The room was almost in darkness by this time, and a chair was knocked over in their struggles. But still MacNutt bore her, fighting and panting, toward the little table between the two windows, where the telephone transmitter stood.

He pinned and held her down on the edge of the table with his knees and his bleeding right hand, while with his left hand he caught up the receiver of the telephone.

"Central, give me the Chelsea, quick—the Chelsea, the Chelsea!"

It was then and then only that the exhausted woman clearly understood what he meant to do. She started up, with a great cry of horror in her throat; but he muffled it with his shaking hand, and, biting out an oath, squeezed the very breath out of her body.

"I want to speak to Durkin," panted MacNutt into the transmitter, a moment later. "Durkin, James Durkin—a man with his arm in a sling. He just took rooms with you today. Yes, Durkin."

There was another long wait, through which Frances lay there, neither struggling nor moving, saving her strength for one last effort.

"Yes, yes; Duggan; I guess that's it!" MacNutt was saying over the wire to the switchboard operator at the hotel. "Yes, Duggan, with a lame arm!"

Then he let the receiver swing at the end of its cord and with his freed hand drew his revolver from his pocket.

The gasping woman felt the crushing pressure released for a moment, and fought to free her right hand. It came away from his hold with a jerk, and as her finger slipped into the little metal piston-ring she flung the freed arm up about his shoulder and clung to him. For a sudden last thought had come to her, a rotten thread of hope, on which swayed and hung her last chance of life.

It was through the coat and clothing of the struggling MacNutt that the little needle was forced, through the skin, and deep into the flesh of the great, beefy shoulder. She held it there until the barrel was empty. then it fell on the floor.

"You'd try to stab me, would you!" he cried, madly, uncomprehendingly, as he struggled in vain to throttle the writhing body, and then raised his revolver, to beat her on the head. The signal-bell rang sharply, and he caught up the receiver instead.

"Now!" he gloated insanely, deep in his wheezing throat. "Now! Is that Durkin speaking? Is that Durkin? Oh, it is! Well, this is MacNutt—I say your old friend MacNutt!" and he laughed horribly, dementedly.

"You've done a good deal of business over the wires, Durkin, in your day, haven't you? Well, you listen now, and you'll hear something doin'! I say listen now, and you'll hear something doin'!"

"Jim!" screamed the woman, pinned down on the edge of the table. "Jim!" she screamed insanely. *"Oh, Jim, save me!"*

She could hear the sharp phonographic burr of her husband's voice through the receiver.

"Oh, Jim, he's killing me!" she wailed.

For MacNutt had taken up the revolver in his trembling left hand and was forcing the head with all its wealth of tumbled hair closer and closer up before the transmitter.

It had been too late! She closed her eyes, and in one vivid, kaleidoscopic picture all her discordant and huddled life stood out before her.

She felt a momentary shiver speed through the body that pinned her so close to it, as she waited, and it seemed to her that the gripping knees relaxed a little. He was speaking now, but brokenly and mumblingly.

"Listen, you welcher, while I—"

She felt the little steel barrel waver and then muzzle down through her hair until it pressed on her skull. At the touch of it she straightened her limp body, galvanically, desperately. He staggered back under the sudden weight.

Then she caught his hand in hers, and with all her strength twisted the menacing barrel upward. The finger trembling on the trigger suddenly compressed as she did so. The bullet plowed into the ceiling and brought down a shower of loosened plaster.

Then he fell, prone on his face, and she stood swaying drunkenly back and forth, watching him through the drifting smoke. Twice he tried to raise himself on

his hands, and twice he fell back moaning, flat on his face.

"It's a lie, Jim, it's a lie!" she exulted insanely, turning and springing to the transmitter, and catching up the still swaying receiver. "Do you hear me, Jim? It's a lie—I'm here, waiting for you! *Jim, can't you hear?*"

But Durkin had fainted away at the other end of the wire, and no response came to her cries.

She flung herself down upon the collapsed MacNutt, and tore open his coat and vest. As she did so the polished pig-skin wallet fell out on the floor.

His heart was still beating, but it would be murder, she felt, to leave him there without attention. His life was his own. She wanted and would take only what the written law would allow. She wanted only her own.

She came to a sudden pause, as she looked from the paper wealth between her fingers to the huge and huddled figure beside her. Some inner and sentinel voice, from the calmer depths of her nature, was demanding of her how much of what had thus come into her hand *was* her own? After all, how much of that terrible and tainted wealth could truly be called their own?—was the untimely question this better part of her was crying out.

She knew that in the end most usurious toll would be exacted for what she took. Her life had taught her that no lasting foundation of good, no enduring

walls of aspiration, could be built on the engulfing sloughs of evil. And as she looked at her prostrate enemy once more, and breathed out a fervent and grateful: "Oh, God, I thank Thee for this deliverance!" a sudden chastening and abnegative passion prompted her to thrust back every dollar she had drawn from that capacious wallet.

Then she thought of the future, of the exigent needs of life, of the necessities of her immediate flight; and her heart sank within her. To begin life again with a clean slate—that had been her constant wish. Yet much as she hungered to do so, she dare not leave it all. As with many another aspiring soul in quieter walks of life, she found herself grimly but sorrowfully compelled to leave the pure idea sacrificed on the altar of compromise. All life, she told herself, was made up of concessions. She could only choose the lesser evil, and through it still strive to grope a little onward and upward.

So she slowly detached one Treasury note—it was for one thousand dollars—from the bulky roll, and the rest she restored to its wallet. It was a contribution to conscience. As she replaced that wallet in the inner pocket of the prostrate man, her feelings were akin to those of some primordial worshipper before his primordial Baal or his exacting Juggernaut. She felt that with that sacrifice she was appeasing her gods. She consoled herself with the thought that the Master of Destiny would know and understand—that she had

given up the great thing that she might not sorrow in the little. As yet, He would not expect too much of her! That minute fraction of what she might have taken, she argued with herself, appeasingly,—surely that little moiety of what they had fought and worked for might be theirs.

It was fifteen minutes later that a frightened and pale-faced woman left word at the corner drug-store that an old gentleman was ill of morphine poisoning, and asked if the ambulance might be sent for. All that the clerk could remember, when he was later questioned by the somewhat bewildered police, was that she had seemed weak and sick, and had asked for some aromatic spirits of ammonia, and that the side of her face was swollen and bruised where she lifted her veil. He was of the opinion, too, that she had been under the drug herself, or had been drinking heavily, for she walked unsteadily, and he had had to call a taxi for her and help her into it. What made him believe this, on second thoughts, was the fact that she had flung herself back in her seat and said, "Thank God, oh, thank God!" half a dozen times to herself.

CHAPTER XXXII

NEITHER Frances nor Durkin seemed to care to come on deck until the bell by the forward gangway had rung for the last time, and the officer from the bridge had given his last warning of: "All visitors ashore!"

Then, as the last line was cast off, and the great vessel wore slowly out from the crowded pier, a-flutter with hands and handkerchiefs, the two happy travelers came up from their cabin.

While the liner was swinging round in midstream, and the good-byes and the cheering died down in the distance, the two stood side by side at the rail, watching the City, as the mist-crowned, serrated line of the lower town sky-scrapers drifted past them. The shrouded morning sun was already high in the East, and through the lifting fog they could see the River and the widening Bay, glistening and flashing in the muffled light.

Frances took it as a good omen, and pointed it out, with a flutter of laughing wistfulness, to her husband. Behind them, she took pains to show him, the churned water lay all yellow and turgid and draped in fog.

"I hope it holds good," he said, linking his arm in hers.

"We shall *make* it hold good," she answered valiantly, though deep down in her heart some indefinite premonition of failure still whispered and stirred. Yet, she tried to tell herself, if they had sinned, surely they had been purged in fire! Surely it was not too late to shake off the memory of that old entangled and disordered life they were leaving behind them!

It was not so much for herself that she feared, as for her husband. He was a man, and through his wayward manhood, she told herself, swept tides and and currents uncomprehended and uncontrolled by her weaker woman's heart. But she would shield him, and watch him, and, if need be, fight for him and with him.

She looked up at his face with her studious eyes, after a little ineloquent gesture of final resignation; and he laughed down at her, and crushed her arm happily against his side. Then he emitted a long and contented sigh.

"Do you know how I feel?" he said, at last, as they began to pace the deck, side by side, and the smoke-plumed city, crowned with its halo of purplish mist, died down behind them.

"I feel as if we were two ghosts, being transported into another life! I feel exactly as if you and I were disembodied spirits, travelling out through lonely space, to find a new star!"

"Yes, my beloved, I know!" she said, comprehendingly, with her habitual little head-shake. Then she,

too, gave vent to a sigh, yet a sigh not touched with the same contentment as Durkin's.

"Oh, my own, I'm so tired!" she murmured.

He looked down at her, knowingly, but said nothing.

Then she stopped and leaned over the rail, breathing in the buoyant salt air. He stood close beside her, and did the same.

"It's fresh and fine and good, isn't it!" he cried, blinking back through the strong sunlight where the drifting city smoke still hung thinly on the skyline in their wake.

She did not answer him, for her thoughts, at the moment, were far away. He looked at her quietly, where the sea-wind stirred her hair.

"Good-bye, Old World, good-bye!" she murmured at last, softly.

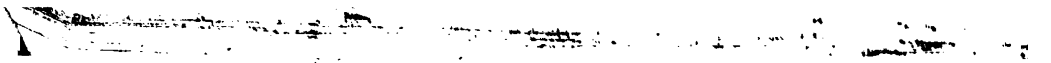
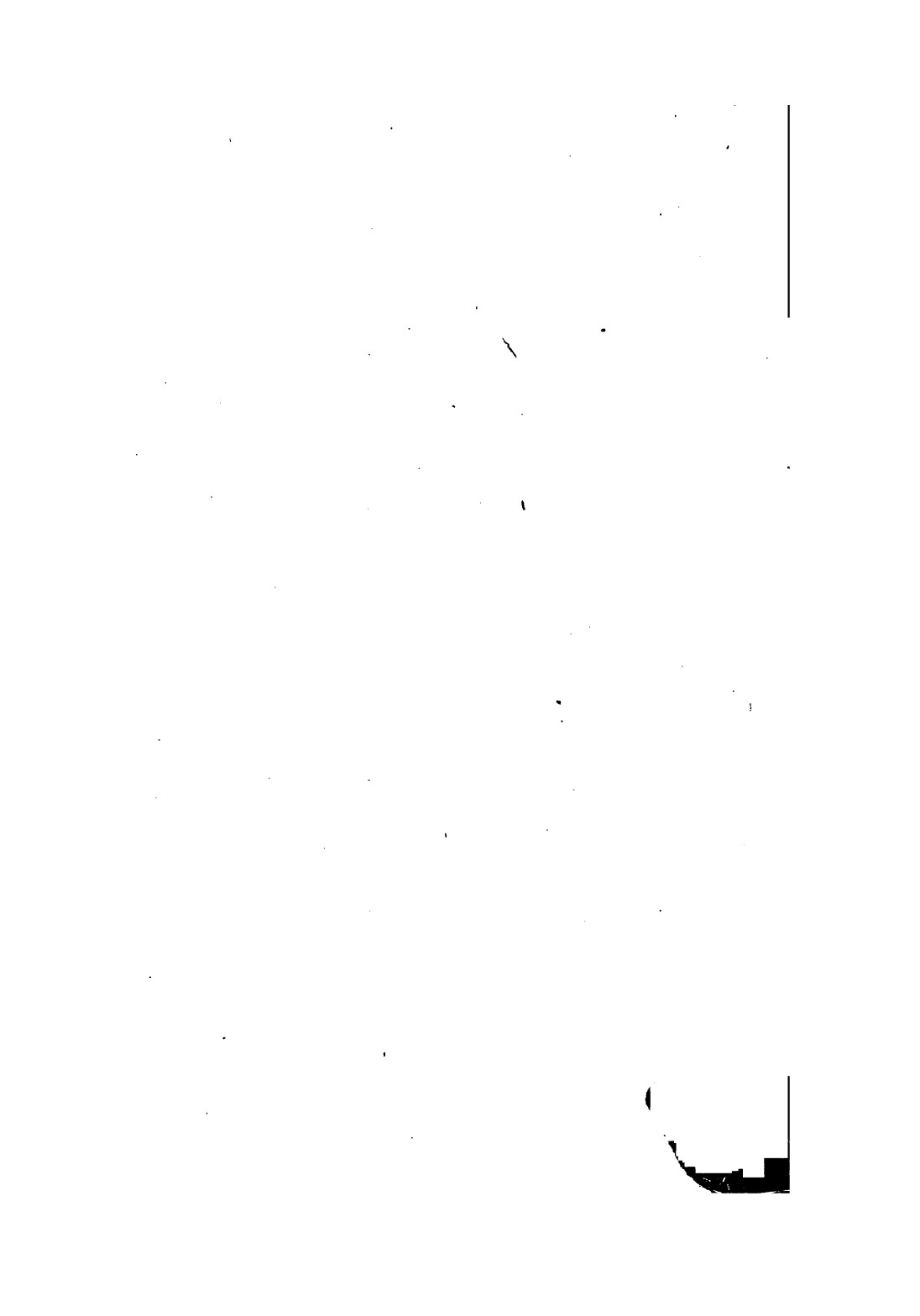
"Why, you're crying!" he said, as his hand sought hers on the rail.

"Yes," she answered, "just a little!"

And then, for some unknown reason, with her habitual sense of guardianship, she let her arm creep about her uncomprehending husband. From what or against what that shielding gesture was meant to guard him he could not understand, nor would Frances explain, as, with a little shamefaced laugh, she wiped away her tears.

"Good-bye, Old World!" he repeated, as he looked back at the widening skyline, with a challenging fi-

nality which seemed to imply that what was over and done with was for all time over and done with. . . .
"Good-bye!"

"Good-bye!" said the woman. But it was not a challenge. It was a prayer.

THE END